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**A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF
ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING, THROUGH FACEBOOK,
ON ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM**

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**A minor dissertation submitted in fullfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Social
Science in Clinical Social Work**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

This research, a qualitative exploration of the effects on adolescent self-esteem, of the social networking site, Facebook, was performed on a sample of fifteen High School attending adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa. This qualitative research utilized a semi-structured interview schedule for face to face interviews with the research participants.

The findings of the research indicate that the social networking site, Facebook most definitely impacts the development of adolescent self-esteem in both positive and negative ways. In terms of self-esteem development, the acceptance, validation and social inclusion experienced as a result of Facebook usage impacts relationships positively and therefore boosts self-esteem. Additionally, the social networking site, Facebook allows the adolescents to shape and mould their preferred identity. The feedback received from friends and family associated with this experimentation, often positive in nature, assists adolescents in the formation of a solid sense of identity and in turn, the development of psychological well-being. The difficulties associated with Facebook use include the impact of privacy invasions, negative feedback, cyber-bullying and comparison of self to others. Although the research indicates that negative effects to self-esteem are experienced, they also indicate that the effects are not unilaterally detrimental to self-esteem, and are in fact mixed. It's the researcher's opinion, as a result of her findings, that the overall positive effects of Facebook usage on adolescent self-esteem outweigh the overall negative effects of its use. Facebook's growing popularity amongst adolescents is validation in itself, for this conclusion.

The main recommendations of this research include the need for further research, focussing on the various effects of Facebook on South African adolescents, as highlighted by this study. This is necessary due to their current developmental stage and as a result of the lack of information on the subject. In addition, recommendations have been made to both schools and social work professionals to ensure that they stay informed and up to date regarding

developments in the social networking world so that relevant treatment and intervention strategies can be developed long with school governing bodies in order to deal with the issues associated with Facebook usage in South African adolescents.

The importance of educating parents, teachers, social work practitioners and adolescents was also highlighted throughout the study. This recommendation is based on the changing nature of online communication. Empowering users, parents, teachers and practitioners will ensure safer usage of the platform and as a result, could possibly decrease the negative impacts associated with its use.

University of Cape Town

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1) Nature and motivation of study

Over the last few years, the researcher has spent her work life functioning in a High School environment, fulfilling the capacity of School Counsellor. Casual observation throughout this period has led her to an awareness which recognizes that online interaction patterns between students are constantly changing – specifically through the use of Facebook.

According to Palfrey and Gasser (2008), no part of modern life has been unaffected by information technology. As a result, it has modified the way we relate to each other and the world at large. The fact is that adolescents today are immersed in an online reality – where any information they want to access is literally at their fingertips (Martines, Alemán and Wartman; 2009). With the use of smartphones such as Blackberry, iPhone and Android, adolescents are permanently connected to their online worlds. Consequently, they are able to manipulate their online realities, changing how they present themselves in society and the way they relate to their friends, depending on the information they choose to share.

The researcher questions what effect this ability to change the way they present themselves and the way they are perceived has on their self-esteem. Additionally, the researcher questions what the motivation behind using a social networking website such as Facebook might be in terms of self-esteem development and maintenance.

The researcher would therefore like to investigate and develop an understanding regarding online interactions through the social networking site Facebook and their effects on adolescent self-esteem, as she believes that it is vital for generic social workers, school social workers, psychologists, parents and teachers to gain a greater understanding of the effects and

impacts of online activity on the well-being of adolescents and when necessary, support and treat the adolescents who have been negatively impacted.

1.2) Context of the study:

Increasingly adolescents are using social networking sites, such as Facebook, as their chosen mode of contact when communicating with peers (Valkenburg and Peter; 2009), consequently, increasingly more of their time is being spent in the online realm. Activities that take place online are unsupervised, leaving the effects and results of such interactions largely unknown, however, according to Pempek et al. (2009) pervasive.

Interactions via the social networking site, Facebook, are geared towards promoting connectivity to other users, and involves sharing and managing information regarding daily activities and life (Mikami et al.; 2010). This is directly linked to the needs of the adolescent user population as it is understood that during the adolescent years (13 – 18 years of age), the importance of intimacy and acceptance by the peer group rises dramatically (Berndt cited in Mikami et al.; 2010).

Current research conducted both internationally and in the South African local context is by and large inconclusive regarding whether or not activities on Facebook are beneficial to its users. The exploration of current research for this research project has led the researcher to believe that the inconclusive results are due to the breadth of the subject; that is Facebook and its psycho-social impact. This underlines the need for targeted research into the subject, which is what the research intends with this research topic.

Additionally, it is important to take note of the fact that the majority of current research conducted internationally on this subject investigates the impact of communication via Facebook on university students and young adults. As Ahn (2011) suggests, although it is slowly developing into an

emerging field, currently, very little information exists around the usage practices of adolescents. Furthermore, there is an even greater lack of information available regarding literature on South African adolescents and their Facebook use, as well as its impact. All of the above mentioned factors serve as strong motivational support for the proposed study to be undertaken.

1.3) Significance of the study

Online social networking through the Facebook website is a phenomenon affecting individuals throughout the world; however, for the purposes of this research, its effects on a group of South African high school students will be examined. Particular emphasis has been placed on Facebook's effects on adolescent self-esteem as the focus point of this study. Research findings are intended to assist parents and schools in understanding and combatting the negative effects Facebook use might have on adolescent self-esteem development. Additionally, it is hoped that the increased knowledge and understanding regarding the topic will assist teachers, Social Workers and institutions that train future professionals who manage adolescent well-being, in helping to empower the adolescents of today – so that they are more aware and in control of the activities they engage in on the Facebook website, and the implications thereof.

Therefore, this study is intended to be of value not only to Social Work practitioners who deal with adolescents, but to adolescents themselves, parents of adolescents and to South African Schools and their teachers as well.

1.4) An overview of Facebook and adolescents' exposure

Facebook is a social networking site that was created in 2004, where its specific focus was to connect University and College students (Christofides, Muise and Desmarais; 2009 and Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe; 2007). Marc

Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook explains that originally, Facebook was intended to connect people to each other (Zuckerberg; 2011). Currently, all these connections have been established (with over 900 million active users (Zuckerberg; 2011) and now the focus of activities on Facebook has shifted to the importance of sharing. In the past, Zuckerberg has referred to information disclosure online as sharing, however, this has currently shifted to the term 'openness' and claims that the current trend on Facebook is that every year, people's 'openness' on the site doubles (Zuckerberg; 2011)

Anyone from the age of 13 and above is able to register as a Facebook user (Nosko et al.; 2010) and create a user profile, where they can present personal information including photographs, videos and personal descriptions (Krämer and Winter; 2008).

Ahn (2011) explains that teenage youth are a unique group of social networking site users as they are the first generation ever to have grown up surrounded by communication technologies and that these increasingly play an important role in the lives of adolescents (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield; 2008). This allows them to develop and mature rapidly (Ahn; 2011) whilst also allowing them the opportunity to reinforce existing relationships with friends, acquaintances and romantic partners (Subrahmanyam et al. 2008).

Personal disclosure on Facebook has been linked to the need for popularity, as well as levels of trust and self-esteem (Christofides, Muise, Desmarais; 2009). Sometimes, issues around disclosure and privacy – such as cyber-bullying and stalking, have led to controversial debates around the internet and social networking sites and their effect on adolescent development (Tom Tong et al.; 2008), however, there is growing evidence that suggests social networking sites, and Facebook in particular are positively associated with a person's sense of self-worth and other types of psychological development (Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe; 2008). Facebook also functions as a medium for various forms of social and emotional support through social

connectedness (Valkenburg and Peter; 2009 ; Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch; 2011 and Joinson; 2008) .

The research that follows, aims to explore these dynamics in order to shed some light on the effect of Facebook, in particular, on adolescents' self-esteem.

1.5) Research question and objectives

Since a paucity of literature specifically dealing with adolescents and their experiences on Facebook exists, the researcher identified the need to qualitatively explore the impact of the effects of Facebook on adolescent self-esteem and therefore posed the following research question:

Does online social networking through Facebook have an effect on adolescent self-esteem?

The objectives of this study are:

- a) To determine what motivates adolescents to use the social networking site Facebook as their chosen form of social networking.
- b) To ascertain what determines adolescents' level of disclosure of personal information on the social networking site Facebook.
- c) To identify how the social networking site Facebook contributes to a positive self-esteem.
- d) To identify how the social networking site Facebook contributes to a negative self-esteem.
- e) To determine the differences between adolescents' online representation of themselves compared to reality.

1.6) Research Methodology

Schurink (*cited in* De Vos: 1998) explains that qualitative research is specifically useful when trying to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie every day human interactions. For this reason, the researcher has selected to make use of the qualitative paradigm.

Additionally, because all research participants are drawn from one particular High School in Cape Town, an explorative case study design will be employed.

1.7) Population

The population used in the case study was a group of mixed gender adolescents from a Cape Town based High School. All were required to be active Facebook users. Because of their age, the population included individuals from Grades 8 to 12.

1.7.1) Sampling method

After choosing the preferred population to be used in the research, the method of Snowball sampling was employed in order to gain data for the proposed research. This refers to the gradual accumulation of samples through contacts and references (Durrheim and Painter *cited in* Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter; 2006). It is expected that because adolescents place such importance on communication with their peers, the researcher suspects they would eagerly involve their peers in the project, therefore allowing for the accumulation of research participants through referrals by contacts already interviewed.

When considering that part of the research is concerned with evaluating the quality of online relationships, it is important to consider possible variances with regard to the demographics of the sample group, such as gender, culture and income group. It has been suggested that there is a female predominance with regard to social communication online (Mikami et al.;

2010). As a result, when coordinating the sampling for this research, it will be important that the researcher distinguishes between the male and female research participants, thereby ensuring fewer discrepancies when interpreting results based on the gender of the subject.

Income group might also influence study results, as participants from lower income groups may not have the same internet accessibility as those from higher income groups. Cultural difference within the group might exert an effect as different cultures might possess different norms and values in terms of communicating and self-presentation online.

1.8) Data collection

The data for this study will be gathered by means of semi-structured face to face interview schedules. Exploring the feelings, experiences and beliefs of the interviewees will be the focus of the interviews, so that the researcher may come to gain a greater understanding regarding the participants' life experiences with regards to Facebook.

The interview schedule comprises **six** parts.

- **Part one** of the schedule constitutes demographic data collection from the sample group.
- **Part two** contains questions related to motivations around using the social networking site Facebook.
- **Part three** is dedicated to the exploration of disclosure determinants with regard to communication through Facebook.
- **Part four** reflects on Facebook and its effects on self-esteem.
- **Part five** revolves around understanding the differences between online self-presentation compared to reality.
- **Part six** transitions into the closing of the interview.

The data will be collected through 15 voice recorded face to face interviews. Anonymity will be maintained, as participants will not be required to state

their names. Honesty and frankness in terms of response to questions is expected as the questions that have been developed are not considered to be invasive and were rather created in order to allow participants to be able to reflect on their own and their peers' experiences.

1.9) Data analysis

Data will be analysed according to Tesch's eight steps (Poggenpoel *cited in* De Vos; 1998). This involves the researcher transcribing interviews and thereafter reading through the transcriptions, dividing the information gathered into similar topics and clusters. Throughout this process, coding of data will take place. "This entails marking different sections of the data as being instances of, or relevant to, one or more of your themes"(Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly *cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006; 324). This will be done so that data received in the transcriptions becomes labelled and meaningful information that can be easily understood for elaboration and interpretation.

1.10) Glossary of concepts

- Adolescence – This word has its roots in the Latin word "*adelesco*" which means "to grow up". It refers to the period of time between puberty and adulthood and is closely associated with the ages between 13-18 years.(Cole and Cole; 2001).
- Self-esteem - One's evaluation of one's own self-worth (Cole and Cole; 2001; G-6).
- Facebook – A social communication tool that was designed to allow users to have contact and communicate with fellow Facebook users (Nosko et al; 2009).
- Profile – a personal web-page where users are able to represent themselves by including personal information, photographs, favourite things and the like (Krämer et al.; 2008).

- Wall and Wall post – a place on an individual's profile where other Facebook users can post messages and attach links for other websites, videos or photographs (Nosko et al.; 2009).
- News-feed - a regularly updating list of stories from friends, pages, and other connections, like groups and events. People can "like" or comment on what they see. Each person's news feed is personalized based on their interests and the sharing activity of their friends .
- Facebook friend/ Friend request – once a Facebook member, users can search for friends (these may be actual friends, acquaintances or strangers) on Facebook. A 'friend request' is sent to prospective friends. This can either be accepted or rejected. Once it has been accepted, users become 'Facebook friends' and are then able to interact with each other freely. (Nosko et al.; 2009)
- cyber-bullying – The use of communication media in order to intimidate, control, manipulate, put down, and humiliate others. (Spears, Slee, Owens and Johnson; 2009; 189)

1.11) Ethical considerations

As the proposed research is of a social nature, efforts have been implemented to ensure that the methodology is sound. Wassenaar *cited in* Terre Blanche et al. (2006) explains that taking ethical considerations into account when conducting research ensures that the autonomy and respect for the dignity of the research participants is maintained, that no harm comes to research participants, that the researcher attempts to maximize the benefits of being involved in the research for the participant and that the entire experience is perceived as being fair and just. The researcher has made efforts to abide by these principles.

In this section, the researcher will explore the ethical considerations that pertain to this particular research topic, namely, collaborative partnership, social value, scientific-validity, fair selection of participants, favourable risk/benefit ratio and informed consent.

1.11.1) *Collaborative partnership*

According to Wassenaar (*cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006) the proposed research should be sensitive to the values, cultural traditions and practices of the community. De Vos (1998) explains that this consideration is also related to the support and involvement of colleagues and their organizational supervisors in relation to the undertaken research.

For the purposes of this research, the South African Department of Education, the relevant school principal as well as his staff, University supervisors and colleagues were all made aware of the proposed research study and are supportive of it.

It is intended that the structure of this collaborative partnership will promote feedback from all the above-mentioned groups and will assist in the formation of a culturally sensitive and non-invasive semi-structured interview schedule, which will be administered in an individual face to face interview between the researcher and the research participant.

These considerations will ensure that the research is ethical and that guidance, support and advice are available to the researcher throughout the entire process.

1.11.2) *Social value*

According to Wassenaar (*cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006) it is imperative that the proposed research is not only beneficial for the researcher but is primarily advantageous to the community being researched. Consequently, he suggests that the researcher should specify the beneficiaries of the research as well as state how they might benefit from it (either directly or indirectly).

The proposed research aims to unpack the topic in a South African context, providing recent and relevant information. The research, once completed, will be shared with the relevant High Schools who might benefit from the knowledge provided by the research. The ultimate aim will be to assist in empowering those (such as school counsellors, parents and teachers) who deal with adolescents and the difficulties arising from their Facebook use on a daily basis, as well as assisting those who use the website to maximize the benefits resulting from their Facebook use.

1.11.3) *Scientific validity*

Wassenaar (*cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006) suggests that studies whose design, methodology and data analysis are not rigorous, justifiable and feasible and do not lead to valid answers of the research question are unethical, as they waste community resources and put the research participants at unnecessary risk. This relates to De Vos's (1998) idea regarding the competence of the researcher in terms of their research practices.

In this study, the researcher is competent as a result of attending and engaging with multiple courses and lectures regarding the ethical guidelines associated with the research procedure throughout her training years. She has also completed a mini research project during her undergraduate years and is therefore familiar with the required research processes. Additionally, the support and guidance of the research supervisor, as well as the communities' involvement and instructions regarding the research will ensure that all practices associated with the research are feasible and valid.

1.11.4) *Fair selection of participants*

This refers to the sample and should ensure that those chosen to participate in the research should be those to which the research question applies (Wassenaar *cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006).

For the purposes of this research, the sample will be drawn from a High School, where an adolescent population who actively uses the social networking site, Facebook, on a regular basis is available. The snowball sampling method, involving the referral of research participants by their peers who are already involved in the process, will ensure the selection of research participants is fair. The random nature of the participants and their participation will ensure that vulnerable participants are not exploited and convenience samples will be avoided.

1.11.5) *Favourable risk/benefit ratio*

This refers to the identification of all possible risks and potential harms or discomforts associated with the research (Wassenaar *cited in* Terre Blanche et al.;2006). De Vos (1998) refers to these as the violation of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. In essence, the researcher must ensure that they are able to safeguard participants' identity and privacy so that there is limited risk to each research participant.

According to De Vos (1998) confidentiality is maintained when participants and their identities are protected. Confidentiality in this study will be assured through the use of pseudonyms when writing the report as well as when findings are reported and explored. Only information regarding ages and grades will be shared in the research report. Additionally, the only individual privy to the participants' real identities will be the researcher. This will ensure that risk/benefit ratio described by Wassenaar (*cited in* Terre Blanche et al.;2006) will minimize all possible risks to the participants as their identities will be fully protected.

1.11.6) *Informed consent*

According to De Vos (1998), informed consent pertains to the research participants agreeing to voluntarily partake in the study. Wassenaar (*cited in* Terre Blanche et al.;2006) indicates that informed consent usually involves the researcher ensuring appropriate information regarding the study is provided to the participants, that they understand the research and data collection process, that their participation in the process is voluntary and that they understand they may withdraw from the process at any time. Finally, the consent is usually formalized.

The first part of the face-to-face interview with each participant has been configured to allow time for the researcher to explain the idea of informed consent as well as discuss any possible concerns the research participants might have as a result. This will ensure that both the research participants as well as the researcher are informed regarding expectations and ensure the transparent nature of the research procedure.

Although it is suggested that written consent forms are signed in order to protect both the researcher as well as the participants (De Vos; 1998 and Wassenaar *cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006), the researcher will not employ this procedure as all interviews will be voice recorded and then transcribed. Therefore, after transcription, the verbal agreement regarding consent will become a formal agreement, which is documented on paper.

1.12) **Reflexivity**

Eagle, Hayes and Sibanda *cited in* Terre Blanche et al. (2006) explain that reflexivity refers to the researcher's ability to identify with or feel disconnected from the subject being explored. These feelings related to the subject at hand will result in specific responses, beliefs, thoughts and perspectives. Consequently, it is vital that the researcher is able to explore

these ideas, so as to ensure that he/she remains objective throughout the research process.

In terms of the current research, the researcher is aware that her own feelings and thoughts regarding the research topic might be influenced due to the fact that the researcher is herself a user of the social networking site, Facebook. Additionally, she has been witness to the effects of both the positive and negative aspects of the use of social networking sites through the accounts given by the adolescent clients she has treated during her years as a High School counsellor. The researcher is aware that it will be imperative that she remains impartial to information gained through the data collection procedure. She considers that since the participants are a mixed group of adolescents (in terms of age, race, religion and gender) their experiences will be different to her own. The impact of these differences and the researcher's thoughts and feelings regarding the information will be taken into consideration when the data is collected and analysed.

Additionally, being trained and having practised as a social worker will assist the researcher in remaining non-judgmental and impartial, which will aid in reducing the impact her assumptions might have on the findings. Finally, additional supervision is always available should the need arise.

1.13) Chapter layout

Chapter 1: presents the background and motivation behind the research project. An overview of the social networking site Facebook as well as adolescents' exposure to it is offered to support and substantiate the motivation. It is followed by a description of the research questions and objectives, research design, a description of the population and sample, data collection and analysis procedures, limitations of the study, glossary of concepts and a description of the chapter layout.

Chapter 2: reviews the relevant literature that defines, describes and illustrates the experiences and effects of Facebook use on adolescents and students the world over. Emphasis and focus will be placed on why Facebook is the chosen social network of choice amongst adolescents as well as Facebook and its impact on self-esteem development.

Chapter 3: presents an extensive account of the research methodology that was utilized during the execution of the study. It includes a description of the research design as well as clarifying the research question and objectives; population and sampling techniques used, a discussion of the research instruments, data collection and analysis procedures and a discussion the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: presents the research findings and discussion.

Chapter 5: offers the research conclusions and relevant recommendations.

1.14) Conclusion

This chapter has explained the background and motivation behind this research project. Henceforth, the researcher shall explore this sparsely-researched topic with the intention of aiding our understanding of adolescents' behaviour regarding online communication through Facebook and the psychosocial effects thereof.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1) Introduction

The social networking site, Facebook, has had a meteoric rise in popularity in recent years. Its pervasiveness has changed the face of online communication in many ways. In terms of usage of online communication, it has now become an irrefutable fact that communication through online means has become the norm in terms of communication amongst adolescents today with the average American adolescent spending at least 30 minutes on social networking sites, such as Facebook, each day (Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert; 2009). According to Pempek et al. (2009) Facebook has had a pervasive impact on youth development. Albeit a new form of behaviour, online social networking is a constantly evolving phenomenon.

Palfrey and Gasser (2008) indicate that as a result of the changes in online communication use, the manner in which people interact is also shifting; so much so, that studies conducted in the year 2000, no longer reflect the impact social networking sites have on adolescents today (Mikami, Szwedso, Allen, Evans and Hare: 2010). Nosko, Wood and Molema (2010) echo these opinions, stating that that very little is known about how people use the Internet for interaction and social networking in today's age.

Notwithstanding the changing trends of online social networking, all relevant research relating to the psycho-social impact of social networking, with a specific focus on adolescence need to be reviewed from both pre- and post-millennium. In this literature review, the researcher will attempt to unpack what is currently known about online social networking through Facebook, both locally and internationally, how adolescents use it today, as well as what impact it has on adolescents and in particular, on their self-esteem. Mention will also be

made as to the theories that exist regarding the possible impact of social networking sites on adolescent self-esteem.

Prior to commencing this literature review, mention needs to be made of the paucity of literature focusing on the impacts of Facebook on adolescents in particular: "The research literature pertaining to youth (12 – 18) and social networking sites is only just emerging, with few studies that explicitly consider the unique contexts of teenagers" (Ahn; 2011; 1436). Emphasis will therefore be made on the need for current literature on the topic, with specific reference to adolescents, considering the rapidly changing face of this behavioural trend.

This literature review will begin with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that contextualise and inform this study, namely:

- Facebook's rise to popularity,
- Facebook and adolescent development,
- Facebook and self-esteem, disclosure of information on Facebook,
- Presentation of self online versus reality

and will conclude with a conclusion.

2.2) Theoretical framework

For the purposes of this study, it is important for the researcher to base all theories used throughout the research within the theoretical models associated with the topic. This will assist in ensuring that explanations are congruent and logical when comparing the behaviours and theories described. It will also assist the reader in gaining a greater understanding of the human development aspect of the current study.

2.2.1) Psychodynamic theory

It is believed that every individual's primary motive in life is the need for human interaction (Levinson; 1986). As such, the psychodynamic approach to understanding human development arose out of the need to understand what

motivates human behaviour. The basic presumption of this approach is that the way we relate to one another is shaped by psychic structures, which evolve as a result of human interaction (Greenberg and Mitchell; 1983). Therefore, it provides insight into how an individual may experience him/herself in the world as well as provide an understanding as to how this experience has developed as a result of his/her past experiences (Cashdan; 1988). This pattern is dynamic in that past experiences may be repeated in the present (Jacobs; 1986), analysts and practitioners refer to this as 'the return of the repressed' (Jacobs; 1986; 6).

The most influential theorist involved in exploring and understanding the psychodynamic approach was Freud. His main focus was regarding the instincts and drive, both unconscious and sub-conscious motivators, that drive human behaviour (Berk; 2006). Through his approach, children were described as moving through a series of stages in which they have to confront specific conflicts between biological drives and social expectations. The way each of the conflicts is resolved determines and develops an individual's ability to learn, get along with others and cope with anxiety (Greenberg et al.; 1983).

Arising from Freud's base, steeped in the understanding of drives (Cashdan; 1988), Melanie Klein proposed the idea of object relations. Here, human relationships are seen as the primary motivator for behaviours. She explained that an infant's relationship with its mother figure is said to be the primary relationship in an individual's life and as such, is said to lay the foundation for how the infant, who develops into a child, adolescent and then adult, will come to understand and interpret their place in the world (Cashdan; 1988).

Klein described the process of development as infants passing through different 'positions'; namely: the paranoid-schizoid, and depressive positions (Greenberg et al.; 1983). Each position is said to present a developmental challenge to the infant, possess specific defences, and ultimately result in the infant forming an understanding of the world (i.e.: the world is either good when all needs are cared for, or bad and dangerous when the infant's needs are unmet) (Cashdan;

1988) . If the experiences of the infant have been unsatisfactory, pathologies are likely to develop (Klein; 1987) .

Similarly to both Klein and Freud, Winnicott also believed in both the validity of instincts and drives, as well as the internal experience of the child, resulting in an understanding of the world and one's place in it. His theory was termed 'attachment theory'. He divided the development of object constancy (the way we relate to the objects in our lives) into three phases, namely: dependence, integration and object relationships (Winnicott; 2002). His theory begins with the baby being completely dependent on its mother – to the point that their relationship is enmeshed and they form a unit. Once the infant is older and begins to move away from its mother (in some cases, quite literally by walking) and is not as dependent on her for survival, the infant begins to experience a greater sense of reality (Greenberg et al.; 1983). The reality experienced, results in anxieties and frustrations which ultimately lead the infant to object relate, and realize that their 'object' (i.e.: the mother figure) is external, real and independent – rendering it outside of the infant's control (Winnicott; 2002). Some of Winnicott's greatest contributions to understanding the dynamics between an infant and their primary caregiver were the ideas of the 'facilitating environment' as well as the 'good enough mother'.

It was through his theories, that the importance of interaction through both the 'facilitating environment' and the 'good enough mother' were understood. The facilitating environment refers to the conditions of the environment which shape the child's development. According to Winnicott (1969) *cited in* Winnicott (2002) and Horner (1984) this should be a contained and empathic experience. Similarly, the idea of the 'good enough mother' refers to a caregiver who is a responsive, sensitive and an available attachment figure (Horner; 1984). These experiences together, allow the infant to feel omnipotent and become the basis of the development of a healthy sense of self (Greenberg et al.; 1983) as well as the basis for the development of trust in early infancy (Winnicott; 1969 *cited in* Winnicott; 2002). "These relational needs are a developmental imperative; if

they are not met, not further meaningful growth can take place” (Greenberg et al.; 1983; 199).

These theories all relate to how individuals come to understand their worlds. If they have optimal care during their formative years, it is believed they will form healthy outlooks on the world, whereas less optimum care will result in psychological difficulties and challenges throughout life. These theories, therefore, have a direct impact on how people will choose to express their needs, choose to form relationships as well as how they deal with stress and anxiety.

The correlation between these theories and the current research is simple. The researcher believes that the adolescent participants, in their own way, are experiencing a ‘re-birth’ into adulthood. Just as object-relation theorists reflect on how vital an optimal environment and care are for an infant and their development, the researcher believes they are also vital in terms of an adolescent’s development – with threatening events experienced resulting in impingements in the adolescent’s development as well as their self-esteem. It will be important to keep in mind that the process is dynamic in nature and thus past life experiences can be re-experienced (Jacobs; 1986). This will provide insight as to the participants’ previous experiences – possibly providing additional insight regarding the chosen behaviours and activities they engage in on the social networking site, Facebook. As Cole et al. (2001) says, in adolescence, often feelings are evacuated through unconscious action rather than holding and being mindful of the difficulty. Facebook provides the perfect platform for such behaviour.

As a result of the fact that the world of online social networking and its impact on adolescents’ development is still a developing area of knowledge, the researcher believes that using the psychodynamic approach and object relation theories as an avenue for understanding, they might provide increased insight and direction within the field.

2.2.2) Psycho-social theory

Erikson's theory related to the area of Ego Psychology, suggests that every individual goes through a process of mastering developmental tasks, where the ego comes to be seen as a positive force in the individual's personal development (Jacobs; 1986 and Berk; 2006). These tasks run through eight stages, each depending on the age of the individual (Erikson 1959 *cited in* Klein; 1987 and Levinson; 1986). Each stage possesses a stage specific crisis that must be overcome, which ultimately leads to the development of the ego – the way an individual is adapted to reality as well as the defences they use in order to securely navigate their reality (Cole et al.; 2001).

This study explores the perceptions of adolescent students, between the ages of 12 and 28. According to Erikson's theory – they are currently navigating through the stage concerning Identity versus Role Confusion (Cole et al.; 2001). During this stage, individuals aim to fulfil the developmental task of identity formation (Greenberg et al.; 1983). If the task is not successfully completed, they run the risk of feeling confused as to their identity as well as their role and place in society at large (Klein; 1987). Therefore, participants are seeking to form their own identity, interact with peers and develop a sense of belonging. This will be important to keep in mind throughout the research procedure as it might assist in understanding the pressures and perceptions participants attach to their interactions on the social networking site, Facebook.

Adolescents experiences on Facebook and the implications these may have on the development of their self-esteem may have an impact on how they master the life tasks associated with this particular stage of their development. Jacobs (1986) uses imagery to explain this idea and suggests that as each stage of Erikson's developmental theory is navigated, a brick is cemented in a persons development. Bricks are not squarely set upon each other, and as a result, as the individual develops, the tower of bricks grows – however, with inbuilt weaknesses. He explains that often, there comes a point where internal or external pressures cause the structure to collapse. "When such a tower falls, it

normally falls only as far as the badly placed brick. It seldom takes the lower, stable bricks with it. So it is in human crisis. Where the weight of later stresses in adult life, external or internal, impose impossible strain, collapse or breakdown frequently goes back as far as that stage at which issues were not satisfactorily resolved" (Jacobs; 1986; 7). Remaining appreciative of this fact throughout this research may assist in enriching the research as this reality may have implications for the adolescents future development.

2.2.3) Operant conditioning theory

Skinner, the theorist associated with this theory, proposed that an individual's behaviour can be modified by the consequences of his/her behaviour (Kazdin; 2001). Therefore, behaviours can change in form, frequency and strength because of the consequences immediately following their expression. Therefore, through behaviour modification procedures, such as operant conditioning, undesirable behaviours can be eliminated, whilst desirable responses can be increased (Berk; 2006).

Through interactions via the online social networking site, Facebook, it is assumed that for majority of participants, actions that take place on the website receive rewards, in essence – positive reinforcement- meaning that the strength and frequency of the interactions and behaviours increase due to the positive consequences (Kazdin; 2001). For the purposes of this study, actions can refer to online behaviours that promote self-esteem, a sense of belonging and the receiving of attention through the Facebook website. This will be important to bear in mind in terms of understanding the reasons behind some of the participants' online behaviours.

2.2.4) Social learning theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory is a perspective which states that people learn from social context, through processes such as modelling and observational learning (Kazdin; 2001). This also became known as imitation (Berk; 2006). In

essence, behaviour is learned primarily by observing and consequently imitated, the behaviour may also be influenced by reward and/or punishment for these actions (Cole et al.; 2001). According to Bandura's revised review of his theory, he suggests that as children grow older, they become more selective in what they choose to imitate (Berk; 2006). It is highly likely that this is because as they become closer in age to adolescence, fitting in and being accepted amongst peers becomes the focus of their activities. Therefore, if a behaviour is not accepted amongst peers, it is unlikely that the individual will choose to model it.

In current research, the manner in which participants choose to engage with the social networking site, Facebook, portray themselves through the site, and interact with others, is all influenced by what they perceive as being acceptable behaviours. These behaviours, specifically with adolescents, are learnt from the environment and then copied as they seek acceptance from society by learning through influential and admired individuals. These then become the norm, developing into habitual practice as acceptance. Therefore, it is suspected that the participants will change the way they portray themselves as well as the way they engage with the Facebook website as a way to promote their social interaction and emulation of other influential Facebook users.

2.3) Facebook's rise to popularity

Since its inception in 2004 (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe; 2007) Facebook's growth has been exponential. In July 2007 the site signed up its 30-millionth user (Joinson; 2008); in 2008, the site had over 61 million active users (Nosko et al.; 2010), whilst today, in the year 2012, there are over 845 million monthly active users (www.facebook.com) – clearly indicating Facebook's exponential growth in popularity. Anyone over the age of 13 is able to host a Facebook profile (www.facebook .com; 2012 and Nosko et al.; 2010). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) explain that its popularity amongst adolescents may be due to the fact that interaction through the website satisfies two important adolescent developmental needs – namely, the need to connect with peers and to enhance one's group identity. This will be expounded upon in the sections that follow.

2.3.1) Facebook's offering to its users

To begin to understand this rise in popularity one first needs to grasp what Facebook, as an online social network is able to offer its users. A typical Facebook profile provides the means for a user to post information about themselves, amongst other things. Users are able to portray themselves on an online template, termed a 'profile page', upon which personal information as well as photographs can be 'posted' for varying degrees of public consumption (Valkenburg et al.; 2006, Mikami et al. ;2010, Tom Tong , Van Der Heide and Langwell; 2008 and Nosko et al.; 2010). Categories allowing for textual descriptions of oneself (wall postings and status updates), also present on a profile (Tom Tong et al.; 2008) are viewable by the users' 'Facebook friends'. This feature allows users to present subjective descriptions of themselves, thereby giving them more control over the information they decide to share compared to face-to-face communication (Krämer et al.; 2008). The sharing of personal descriptions facilitates the searching and finding of other users who share similar social identities (Sobel; 2008 *cited in* Mesch et al.; 2010).

Online social networking sites, such as Facebook, promote anonymous interactions as well as the recognition of social connections between friends (Mikami et al.; 2010). Additionally, users are able to interact with each other on an individual basis as each Facebook profile has an e-mail inbox and 'chat' application, where Facebook users and their friends can choose to contact profile holders directly. In this situation the message remains private and it is not displayed on the user's Facebook wall (Nosko et al.; 2010).

2.3.2) Social connection

Without question, Facebook's popularity is strongly linked to the human need for connection (Sheldon, Abad and Hinsch; 2011). According to their hypothesis, user's feelings of disconnection motivate Facebook usage as a coping strategy as it provides an easily accessible means to maintaining connectedness to others.

Facebook is primarily dedicated to forming and managing impressions, relational maintenance and relationship seeking (Tom Tong et al.; 2008 and Mikami et al.;2010). It enables users to create and maintain large and diffuse networks of relationships from which they are then able to draw resources (Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe; 2008) resulting in larger, less intimate networks of friends rather than tightly-knit small groups experienced as a result of face-to-face communication.

This is all achieved through users writing messages and adding other individuals as Facebook 'friends' to their personal contact lists (Krämer and Winter; 2008 and Nosko, Wood and Molema; 2010). The information contained on a person's profile is not only placed there by the profile holder, but can also be added to by the profile holder's friends as well as the programs embedded in the Facebook system itself (Tom Tong et al.; 2008). Examples include games and applications accessible on the user's Facebook profile, such as FarmVille and Songpop, which upload their own information onto a user's profile, once the application has been used.

Sheldon et al. (2011) theorise that the connection a user experiences as a result of interactions on the social networking site is the reward of its use, and therefore reinforces and maintains an individual's usage. However, they also caution that interactions on the social networking site, Facebook, do not necessarily remedy a user's feeling of disconnection. They describe, "Perhaps, this helps explain the booming popularity of social networking activities such as Facebooking. Such activities offer an easy and painless route towards a social experience that people need, a route that indeed supplies positive feelings but that does not manage to replace more concrete social relations" (Sheldon et al.; 2011; 8).

In addition to this, Facebook offers other incentives, streamlining the multiple modes of modern-day communication. Livingstone (2008) *cited in* Ahn (2011) notes that communication that occurs over social networking sites such as Facebook is a convergence of separate activities. Applications such as e-mail,

instant messaging, photo album creation, diaries as well as music and video uploading and downloading, which used to require spending time on different websites and programs, now all take place through the social networking site, Facebook. It is therefore predictable that progressively more peer-interaction occurs online for many adolescents today (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield; 2008), as the merging of all these activities on social networking sites such as Facebook, makes communication that much easier and less time-consuming.

2.4) Facebook and adolescent development

Facebook provides adolescents in particular with a unique social platform, upon which they are able to connect to peers and explore the world of online social networking. For various reasons, Facebook might in fact aid adolescent development in its ability to facilitate their socialization in a world that is fast becoming 'cyberspace' predominated. As 'cyberspace' predominates modern day communication, conversely it is adolescents who predominate 'cyberspace'. "Adolescents are currently the defining users of the Internet. They spend more time online than adults do, and they use the Internet for social interaction more often than adults do" (Valkenburg and Peter; 2009). Without doubt, therefore, social networks play a highly influential role with regard to adolescent development.

During adolescence, the quantity of peer interactions and the intimacy experienced in friendships rises dramatically (Berdnt; 199 cited in Mikami et al; 2010). Wolf (1988) suggests this is because the cognitive development associated with stage assists them in recognizing what he terms 'parental defects' (Wolf; 1988; 58). This assists adolescents in being able to move away from their idealized self objects (their parents, as discussed in the theoretical framework dealing with object constancy) and instead move toward the peer group (Cashdan; 1988). Winnicott, 1960 (cited in Winnicott 2002) explains that adolescents are only able to move away from their parents and become more involved with a peer group because of the security experienced throughout their earlier development and their positive experiences in object constancy. Their

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consequent involvement with peer groups allows the adolescent to become involved with a new sub-culture, resulting in the development of their own values and therefore, own identity (Wolf; 1988) and ultimately achieving autonomy (Winnicott 2002).

During this time, both the adolescent's personality as well as the social contexts experienced, assist in helping them form their own individualized identity (Berk; 2006). Erik Erikson, the developer of the psycho-social theory relating to human development, explains that during adolescence the developmental crisis adolescents are faced with is related to creating a secure sense of personal identity (Greenberg et al.; 1983). This identity is based on both their individual capacity and their social spheres. If the developmental crisis is not resolved and the adolescent does not achieve a sense of personal identity (both personally and in society at large), they might be confronted by a variety of psychological problems later in life (Erikson, 1968 cited in Cole et al.; 2001 and Berk; 2006).

Cole and Cole (2001) refer to this as a crisis described by Erikson as adolescents being preoccupied with finding their 'true self'. According to these theorists, a 'true self' revolves around noticing the disparities between their own behaviour and that of being true to their real selves (i.e: what they really want). This leads to the question every adolescent struggles with – 'How much do I like myself?', which has an impact on their self-esteem development. According to Cole et al. (2001) peer acceptance during this time is of utmost importance in terms of developing a strong self-esteem, as often peers can assist in the promotion of a more positive self-esteem because of the acceptance and support they provide.

"Research has shown that over the past century adolescence has become more and more separated from adult life; most adolescents today spend much of their time with their peers" (Subrahmanyam et al.; 2008; 124). Sheldon et al. (2011) and Pempek et al. (2009) explain that this phenomenon is vital for an adolescent's development as feelings of social-satisfaction; inclusion and acceptance are amongst the most powerful predictors of psychological and physical well-being. Arnette (2000) *cited in* Pempek et al. (2009) expands on this

idea and suggests that the division of 'adult life' and 'adolescence' is separated by a period called 'emerging adulthood'. They suggest that this period of time offers more freedom and independence than that offered by adolescence, providing the opportunity for young emerging adults to explore difficulties of adolescence more deeply. The suggestion here, is that the period of 'emerging adulthood' can be improved through communication via Facebook. The social network provides the social and emotional support through connections to peers, as well as information resources (Joinson; 2008) needed in order to potentially assist adolescents in coming to terms with individual difficulties. On the other hand, Cole et al. (2006) indicate that studies on adolescent self-esteem from the United States show that adolescents experience a marked decline in overall self-esteem during early adolescence (from the age of 12). A steady increase in their self-esteem is only evident after the ages of 14 or 15. This underpins the highly influential role that Facebook might have to play during this highly impressionable and pivotal period of human development that is adolescence.

2.4.1) Facebook and its uses for adolescents

Interactions and friendships established during adolescence may become critical in early adulthood, as peers become primary sources of support (Mikami et al; 2010). Therefore, it has become imperative that we come to understand the experiences of today's adolescents, on social networking sites, such as Facebook. Sheldon et al. (2011) refers to adolescents' usage of the social network, Facebook as an addiction. This idea needs further unpacking, as Nosko et al (2010) point out, relatively little is known regarding how individuals use social networking sites.

Joinson (2008), Ahn (2011) and Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006) all refer to one of the uses of Facebook as being a 'social-searching' tool. This refers to an individual's ability to find out more information about offline contacts, or people they have met or know, but with whom they are not Facebook friends. This is different to the idea of 'social-browsing' - this is when the social networking site,

Facebook, is used to develop new connections, possibly with the aim of becoming friends offline. Both social-searching and social-browsing allow the user to potentially widen their social network and furthermore provide access to possible valuable resources, information and social support (Ahn; 2011). An example of this might be an adolescent finding individuals on group pages who share similar interests and then attempting to start a friendship. Although Facebook clearly possesses both functions, Joinson (2008) indicates that in research conducted with 2000 students in the United Kingdom, it seems 'social-searching' – or using Facebook to find out more about people they may know, is one of the primary uses of the website.

Facebook's role in facilitating modern day interactions amongst adolescents doesn't stop here. In separate research conducted internationally by Lampe et al. (2006), Pempek et al. (2009) and Ahn (2011), results revealed that the majority of students who use the Facebook website as their chosen form of social networking, indicated that the primary use of Facebook was to keep in contact with old friends – through a form of surveillance – where they are able to track the happenings and keep up to date with a large diffuse group of Facebook friends. Pempek et al. (2009) refer to this behaviour as 'lurking', as it often involves reading other's information and posts without actually replying. Steinfield (2008) explains that the surveillance of friends allows individuals to learn more information about each other. This information gaining may lead to the realization that commonalities between users exist, which in turn may lead to a decreased fear of rejection as well as disinhibition when initiating communication.

Although very little information is available regarding the South African context of these findings, the current research proposes that South African results will be very similar to their international counter-parts – with the primary use of Facebook being social connection, keeping in contact with old friends as well as being aware of and up to date regarding friends and their day-to-day activities.

2.4.2) Social capital

Accumulating information about other users may have other benefits too. The accumulation of social capital – where users are able to invest minimally and maintain ties with distant friends and other contacts (Joinson; 2008 and Ellison et al.; 2007) – is a well described incentive for social networking. Social capital, as described by Ellison et al. (2007), broadly refers to the resources gained through relationships amongst people – these may be physical or psychological, actual or virtual.

In the above-mentioned research, Joinson (2008) uncovered further incentives for social networkers to choose Facebook as their network of preference. Joinson (2008) indicates that certain users gain gratification through playing with the online applications and games linked to the social networking site, such as Farmville or SongPop.

Being in the know with regards to the ongoings of friends and social circles, is instrumental for an adolescent's sense of acceptance into their social circles of choice. This in turn ties in with Facebook's influence on its users' social popularity, as it aids in fulfilling other needs, namely the need to belong; as observed in the following account: "...the need to belong has been shown to correlate positively with the willingness to join a social network. For young adults, the need to be part of their social group and the need for popularity are key elements in their lives. Hence, it should not be surprising that young adults report that having a presence on sites such as Facebook connects them to a social network, and being visible within a social network is perceived to be an important aspect of popularity" (Christofides, Muise and Desmarais; 2009; 342). Facebook provides the platform for adolescents to be noticed in 'the world out there' and also facilitates their surveillance of various social happenings - both of which are fundamental to adolescent development.

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2.4.3) Disinhibition

The disinhibitive effect of Facebook was touched upon earlier, but is this effect evidence based and if so, what are the contributing factors? “Disinhibition refers to the loss of constraints that a person experiences when behaviour is no longer controlled by concerns about self-presentation or judgments by others “ (Joinson; 1999 *cited in* Mesch et al.; 2010; 575). Mesch et al. (2010) observes an increase in both disinhibition and self-disclosure in Facebook users, which they attribute to the omission of nonverbal cues, such as visual, auditory and contextual cues, and to their greater ‘controllability’ online. This theory is maintained by Valkenburg et al. (2009) who also attributes this behavioural shift, to the absence of social cues from the social domain of online communication. Valkenburg et al. (2009) further explain that to adolescents in particular, Facebook affords users more protection from being judged or perceived in an uncomfortable light, than when compared to normal face-to-face daily interaction. This incentivizes Facebook’s popularity amongst adolescents, amongst whom self-esteem plays a significant role.

Considering Facebook’s disinhibitive effect, it is not surprising to find that romantic confessions by young adults occur more frequently over computer mediated communication, such as e-mails or private messages through social networking sites, than as observed in face-to face communication (Joinson; 2003 *cited in* Mesch et al.; 2010).

Considering all of the above-mentioned literature, Facebook’s popularity amongst adolescents is by no means surprising as it caters for many of their psycho-social needs in ways that normal face-to-face communication cannot.

2.5) Facebook and self-esteem

“One of the most pervasive facts regarding self-esteem, is that humans have a ‘need for self-esteem” (Schlenker; 1980 *cited in* Krämer et al.; 2008; 107). Berk (2006) and Levinson (1986) state that this is one of the most important aspects

of self-development, as evaluations regarding our own competencies will affect our emotional experiences, future behaviours, as well as long term psychological adjustment. Wolf (1988) describes self-esteem as being a positive self-experience, derived from the feeling of cohesion and well-being. The contrasting experience is one of fragmentation, where aspects of one's self-experience are experienced as no longer fitting together or uncoordinated (Greenberg et al.; 1983).

Winnicott; 1960 (*cited in* Winnicott; 2002) explains that self-esteem is rooted in gradual development of a sense of security. This is developed through experiences related to positive environmental provision through society as well as personal growth and development (going as far back as the experiences associated with the development of object constancy). Both need to be experienced as reliable and durable, allowing the adolescent to recover after being hurt. Cole et al. (2001) and Cashdan (1988) concur with this idea and explain the foundations of self-esteem development are entrenched in the parenting experience of early childhood. They explain that parents' acceptance of their children, their setting of clearly defined limits as well as their respect for their child's individuality all assist in ensuring the production of high self-esteem in late and middle childhood. The support and limitations provided by parents during early development, allow the adolescent an awareness regarding their personal boundaries. As a result, the new found freedom associated with adolescence does not result in feelings of disorganization and chaos, but rather in feeling of efficacy and assurance – as a positive self-esteem allows the adolescent to maintain a sense of control and as a result, self assured.

During adolescence, adolescents are often known to overestimate the extent to which they are being watched and evaluated by others, this is frequently as a result of the difficulties and insecurities associated with their developing sense of self-esteem. This is referred to as 'imaginative audience behaviour' (Valkenburg et al.; 585; 2006). As a result, they can become preoccupied with how they appear in the eyes of their peers. As reflected on earlier, during the adolescent years, peer acceptance is highly valued and as a result, adolescents

can be highly critical of themselves in order to obtain this acceptance (Cole et al; 2001 and Berk; 2006). This self-criticism can be highly detrimental to the development of an adolescent's self-esteem.

Additionally, often the evaluations peers assign to the adolescents' representation of themselves can affect the development of an adolescent's social self-esteem. This is where the social networking site, Facebook, can have a positive effect on the development of an adolescent's self-esteem, as it allows them the opportunity to manage the way in which they choose to present themselves, as well as the way in which they choose to express themselves, (Krämer et al; 2008) both of which are vital tasks in adolescence. This experimentation with identity is completed in a manner which is impossible in the real world, allowing adolescents to test the different aspects of their personality (Mesch et al; 2010). However, as Christofides et al. (2009) pointed out, an individual's identity is not only a construct of what the user chooses to share on their online profile, but is also the product of social feedback and commenting.

2.5.1) Positive feedback and its effects on adolescent self-esteem

The above being said, it is not surprising that many research articles emphasize the effects of online social networking on self-esteem. Ahn (2011) clearly states that this particular topic requires the researcher to take the characteristics of the youth being examined into account, thereby not only individualizing, but also contextualizing each case. "Youth enter these online communities with existing traits. They also have varying motivations for using social networking sites. Such factors influence with whom they interact, how they behave and ultimately how they develop through their participation in social networking communities" (Ahn; 2011; 1439). In other words, existing traits such as gender, self-esteem or inhibition will influence how individuals communicate through Facebook.

Steinfeld et al. (2008) indicate, for example, that if a user is extroverted, they are more likely to share more information and as a result will receive more responses. More positive responses are positively correlated to an increase in self-esteem. Therefore, it can be said that the social networking site itself, in this case – Facebook – does not cause feelings of positive self-esteem or well-being, but rather that the reactions, whether they be positive or negative, received via the site are the key mechanisms for the development of a positive or negative self-esteem (Ahn; 2011; Pempek et al.; 2009 and Steinfeld et al.; 2008).

“Positive feedback enhanced adolescents’ self-esteem, and negative feedback decreased their self esteem” (Valkenburg et al.; 589; 2006), this idea corresponds with the opinions of Ahn (2011) and Steinfeld et al. (2008). Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) adds more weight to this theory and explains that in research conducted with adolescents, it was clear that feedback from social networking sites, such as Facebook, impacted self-esteem – with positive feedback enhancing it and negative feedback decreasing it. Like past researchers, they emphasized the importance of context when considering their findings: “It is impossible to tell whether negative feedback *per se* reduced self-esteem or whether participants with lower self-esteem typically perceived the feedback they received as more negative, which in turn caused a further dip in their self-esteem” (Subrahmanyam et al.; 2008; 126).

These ideas regarding feedback and its effect on adolescent self-esteem are in congruence with the aforementioned theories related to object relations. According to these theories, the development of a healthy self-esteem is associated with the achievement of object constancy (Horner; 1984), which is seen as the ability to experience both hostile and loving feelings towards the same object. In other words, an adolescent with a healthy sense of self (or positive self-esteem) will be able to tolerate both the positive and negative feedback they might receive from friends through the Facebook website, and additionally will be able to differentiate between the social networking site making them feel good or bad about themselves, and their friends’ interactions having an effect on them.

In research conducted by Mikami et al. (2010) it was found that adolescents reported experiencing a more positive self-esteem associated with a larger number of online friends. In earlier research it was believed that even though the accumulation of Facebook friends may have helped promote a positive self-esteem, because of intrinsic limitations with regards to personalized information and nonverbal cues, internet based interactions might have resulted in lower quality relationships than would face-to-face interactions (Keisler, Seigel and McGuire; 1984 *cited in* Mikami et al.; 2010). However, current research indicates that a continuity in online and face-to-face communication, leads to continuity of friendship quality (Mikami et al. 2010).

The accumulation of social capital, as mentioned earlier, through the accumulation of large groups of friends and the social gains that stem therefrom, are also thought to impact upon self-esteem. Ellison et al. (2007) found that the ties created by social capital are often linked to psychological wellbeing such as self-esteem as well as satisfaction with life. Similarly, bridging social capital – which allows users to maintain and support loose social ties from which resources can be drawn – was also found to impact positively on self-esteem (Steinfeld et al.; 2008).

However, the benefit of social capital is not merely a numbers game. Similarly, merely participating in the realm of online social networking does not automatically gain the user beneficial effects on self-esteem. Rather, it is a matter of the quality of online interactions, as opposed to quantity, according to Mikami et al. (2010) that impacts upon self-esteem. Positive social communication and friendship quality online, will contribute to social-emotional functioning and are therefore more significant contributors to effecting positive self-esteem. Conversely, negative online experiences and relationships were found to be predictors of adjustment problems and negative perception of self.

2.5.2) The impact of increased awareness

Joinson (2008), as discussed earlier in the chapter, clearly identified one of the primary uses of the Facebook website as being 'social-searching and-browsing' and at times, a form of surveillance. He makes it very clear that having the increased awareness regarding others' actions and experiences has important implications for the user's self-esteem, relationships with others and understanding of self. This is a thought-provoking consideration if one considers that his research found that a user's desire to engage in surveillance of their peers on Facebook motivates the frequency with which they visit the site.

Pempek et al. (2009) similarly explains that gathering feedback from peers is part of the developmental challenges of emerging adulthood. Therefore, an increased awareness regarding friends' activities through social searching and browsing may assist the adolescent users in developing an identity, and through this activity, also have an effect on the development of their self-esteem. As Arnette (2000) cited in Pempek et al. (2009) explains, Facebook provides adolescents with a platform to express who they are. Through increased awareness as a result of social browsing, more is available to the adolescent and as a result, provides them with more 'food for thought' in terms of how they might like to shape their identity. Ahn (2011) refers to this as a social group, through an online social network, who provides bridges to new information and ideas; allowing adolescents to shape their identities through their increased knowledge.

2.5.3) Negative feedback and its effects on adolescent self-esteem

Facebook's effects on self-esteem might however be unfavourable too. The realm of online communication, comes hand-in-hand with various unsavoury behaviours, to which no user is immune. Cyber-bullying refers to the use of communication media to intimidate, control, manipulate, put down and humiliate others (Spears et al.; 2009). Palfrey (2008) *cited in* Spears et al. (2009) takes this idea further by explaining that cyber-bullying takes various forms. It

may be by way of direct communication: such as text messaging, sending a private message on Facebook or bullying through private chats online; semi-public: such as posting harassing messages in an e-mail sent to a few friends; or public communications: such as writing a message on the victim's Facebook wall that other Facebook 'friends' are privy to, or creating groups that are devoted to making fun of the victim.

Cyber-bullying through online media such as Facebook has become a grave reality for many adolescent Facebook users. The increasing effect of cyber-bullying on adolescents' self-esteem can no longer be discredited (Ahn; 2011). Spears, Slee, Owens and Johnson (2009) explain that this form of bullying has increased dramatically over the last few years and believe the effects of such interactions to be highly detrimental. They explain that the impact might be far greater than conventional bullying because it can take place at any time and any place (Belsey; 2005 *cited in* Spears et al; 2009).

If one considers the fact that most adolescents today carry around internet-enabled cellular telephones, the risk and impact of being a victim of cyber-bullying is dramatically increased, whilst the role parents and teachers are able to take in intervening is conversely decreased. "The 'parallel universe' of cyberspace, which exists alongside family and schooling contexts, presents additional challenges for 'real-world' relationships" (Spears et al.; 2009; 190). This poses a great threat to the development of an adolescent's self-esteem, as when they are victimised through interactions on social media like Facebook, there is no escape from it – they are affected both in reality and in their cyber world - which as Spears et al. (2009) explains, are very closely linked in an adolescent's daily reality. Additionally, "What used to occur in the privacy of one's own social network is now open to abuse by others, many of whom may be complete strangers" (Spears et al.; 2009; 194). Valkenburg et al. (2006) agrees with the abovementioned conclusions and explains that often, because negative reactions and feedback are public in nature through online social media, they are more likely to have a stronger negative impact because of the public nature of their response. When one considers how vital social acceptance and inclusion

is for an adolescent's development – one can imagine the impact such bad publicity might have on the development of a negative self-esteem.

Spears et al. (2009) explain that the impact of cyber-bullying is often differentiated by the type of bullying experienced. For example, the misuse of a photograph might not have the same impact as the spreading of a vicious rumour. As was indicated previously by Palfrey (2008) *cited in* Spears et al. (2009), direct, semi-public and public forms of bullying all impact the adolescent victim differently.

2.6) Disclosure of information on Facebook

Self-disclosure amongst peers plays an important role in an adolescent's development, as it is thought to give adolescents the social resources to deal with difficulties later in life (Buhrmester and Prager; 1995 *cited in* Mesch et al.; 2010). Mesch et al.(2010) continue to explain that norms of online identity disclosure are associated with age as well as frequency of use. Mesch et al. (2010) explain that the more frequently one uses the Internet, the more comfortable one becomes with disclosing personal information online. In terms of age and self-disclosure, Ahn (2011), Nosko et al. (2010) and Mesch et al. (2010) all concur that as an individual's age increases, the tendency to self-disclose online has the propensity to decrease. Similarly, Berk (2006) states that those adolescents who are overly dependent on social acceptance by peers will often put themselves 'on the line', in this case, sharing increased information in order to raise their self-esteem levels.

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2.6.1) Positive aspects of self-disclosure

Nosko et al. (2010) explain that one of the primary goals of social networking sites is to encourage the disclosure of personal information with other online users. In research conducted by Christofides et al. (2009), in Canada, they indicated that adolescents are very receptive to the benefits of online disclosure. Valkenburg et al. (2009) refer to this as the Internet enhanced self-disclosure

hypothesis. This refers to the positive effects of the Internet on social connectedness and well-being, and how they are enhanced by an individual's ability to self-disclose information online. Usually, it is the socially anxious adolescents who choose to disclose online rather than in face-to-face scenarios, as the Internet provides a more protected environment where the anxiety provoking auditory and visual cues of face-to-face communication are diminished (Christofides et al.; 2009).

Online self-disclosure may in fact aid self-esteem and identity development in adolescents in particular. As children move into adolescence, self-disclosure plays a part in expanding their circle of friends (Mesch and Beker; 2010). Self-disclosure is instrumental in this process as it enhances intimacy, communication and understanding between individuals and their peers (Jourard; 1971 *cited in* Mesch et al.; 2010 and Christofides et al.; 2009) and therefore aids in creating a sense of shared identity amongst friends. Pempek et al. (2009) state that the identity challenges of emerging adulthood may be addressed through self disclosure – where difficulties can be discussed and resolved with the aid of peers. Here, it is suggested that feedback from others, a decrease in social shyness due to the anonymity of online communication and the facilitation of social relationships all aid in dealing with the difficulties associated with this tumultuous time (Pempek et al.; 2009).

2.6.2) Negative consequences of online self-disclosure

Online self-disclosure might lead to unwanted consequences too. "Pervasive technology often leads to unintended consequences, such as threats to privacy and changes in the relationship between public and private sphere" (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn and Hughes; 2009; 83). Social networking sites are designed for lowering users' privacy levels and may exploit the users' privacy of information (Ibrahim 2008 *cited in* Debatin; 2009). This is in direct opposition with the fact that privacy is recognized as a general human need (Mesch et al.; 2010). Not only might online disclosure compromise users' privacy of information, it might also render users more susceptible to unwanted responses, such as online

abuse, bullying, gossiping and stalking. Consequently, increased use of the Internet by adolescents has created social anxiety around the fact that young individuals may be disclosing personal information that can be used for both harassment and abuse (Mesch et al.; 2010). Boyd and Ellison (2008) *cited in* Debatin et al. (2009) indicate that particular areas of concern regarding online social networking and safety include: the inadvertent disclosure of personal information, damaged reputation due to rumours and gossip, unwanted harassment and stalking, use of personal information by third parties, and hacking and identity theft. Nosko et al. (2010) similarly explain that reservations around personal safety for the vulnerable users who might be stalked or threatened, as well as stigmatized minority groups, remain a serious area of concern in terms of online social networking. According to Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) one of the main challenges in terms of disclosure of information on Facebook and other social networking sites is that words can be copied, altered or shared with users who might not necessarily have been intended as the recipients of the shared information.

2.6.3) Motivators of online self-disclosure

It is clear that adolescents disclose information online for various rewards gained in spite of the many drawbacks mentioned, but what other factors motivate online disclosure and influence the types of information discussed? According to Joinson and Paine; 2007 (*cited in* Mesch et al.; 2010), social networking sites such as Facebook allow individuals to post personal content online. This refers to the information that is unknown to others that the user decides to make public knowledge. Debatin et al. (2009) explain that users feel safe and protected in doing so because they believe that only their 'Facebook friends' have access to the information they share because of the privacy settings they have activated on their accounts. They further explain that even though users restrict their profiles, they do not seem to consider that their level of privacy and protection is relative to the number of Facebook 'friends' they possess. Christofides et al. (2009) concur, and clarify that disclosure on Facebook is maintained by norms that have arisen regarding what information

should be shared online. In other words, users tend to share or disclose information based on what their peers have chosen to disclose. However, in research conducted by Ahn (2011), it was found that factors such as age, gender, experience level and personality traits all influence the risks youth take in disclosing personal information online.

It would appear that behaviour online differs considerably to behaviour in the 'real world' when it comes the disclosure of personal information. According to Bargh et al. (2002) *cited in* Mesch et al. (2010), this is motivated by the perceived anonymity of the online environment, which is thought to reduce the risks associated with disclosing personal information online. For example, an adolescent communicating through Facebook may construct a self-portrayal that differs from reality. At times, this can result in the user feeling safe and protected online, as they believe they have control over how others users are likely identify them. In research conducted by Christofides, Muise, Demarais (2009) *cited in* Mesch et al. (2010) it was found that an individual's disclosure was often predicted by the need for popularity amongst friends as well as for increasing levels of trust online. "Having a presence on Facebook requires that a person post many pictures, have active discussions with friends, and share personal interests and information. Popularity and disclosure thus become inextricably linked" (Christofides et al.; 2009; 343). Nosko et al. (2010) found that individuals at the greatest risk of threat were those seeking relationships as it seems that people who are searching for romantic relationships use the online medium as a way to represent themselves and in a manner, advertise themselves, to potential dating partners.

Mesch et al. (2010) explains that Facebook provides its users with an element of uncertainty which face-to-face communication does not, and as result users feel the need to create increased trust. They achieve this by being willing to share personal information. This is also done to support the continuation of online communication. Walther (2002) *cited in* Mesch et al. (2010) investigated the use of self-disclosure relying on the uncertainty reduction theory and found that individuals disclose much larger amounts of personal information on computer

mediated communication (such as the social networking site Facebook) compared to what was disclosed in face-to-face communication. This is because "...in FtF (Face-to-Face) environments, much of the information about others can be gathered from visual observation, online environments require purposeful disclosure of personal information to reduce uncertainty and to overcome the lack of contextual and personal information" (Mesch et al.; 2010; 572).

In collaborative research between Ohio and Germany, Debatin et al. (2009) found that Facebook's exponential rise in popularity has made it an indispensable tool in achieving social capital and connectedness with large groups of people. As a result, according to Debatin et al. (2009) the benefits Facebook provides for its users far outweighs the concerns around privacy – even when privacy invasions are experienced. Similarly, Nosko et al. (2010) explains that for adolescents, disclosure of information across a variety of domains (for example, at school or online) has become an integral part of their everyday life experience. As a result, the gap between private and public selves is narrowing resulting in younger users being less cautious when disclosing highly personal information as well as feeling more comfortable when doing so online (Goodstein; 2007 cited in Nosko et al.; 2010).

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Ahn (2011) and Valkenburg et al. (2006) both indicate that this may be as a result of the fact that the more one expresses information about oneself online the more one's relationships with online peers improve. These positive interactions lead to an increase in self-esteem as well as improved psychological well-being, thereby positively reinforcing self-disclosure on Facebook.

2.7) Presentation of self online versus reality

Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) clearly indicate that online communication media, like the social networking site, Facebook, have become an important social tool in the life of an adolescent today.

The anonymity which the online social networking realm affords adolescents is vitally important for various reasons. Mesch et al. (2010) explains that the anonymity of online communication provides the adolescents with an opportunity to test different aspects of their personality and allows them to promote a state of equality. This is achieved through the diminished ability to recognize social dividers such as gender, race, socio-economic status and age. In essence, adolescents are now able to decide what they wish to display on their Facebook profiles as well as what they want their friends to see. "This process of developing identity is quite salient to adolescents who are experiencing a time of rapid growth and development" (Ahn; 2011; 1438). It is therefore understandable that being able to choose how to represent oneself online, through a social networking site such as Facebook, is appealing to adolescents, as establishing a coherent identity is a fundamental task of adolescence (Subrahmanyam et al.; 2008) and is more easily tested and achieved through Facebook. Facebook affords users the freedom to choose how to represent themselves in what is perceived as a safe environment. Mesch et al. (2010) describes that gender, race, socio-economic status and age are often barriers which deter individuals from forming relationships in reality. However, in online communication forums such as Facebook, the formation of similarities based on shared interests is often achieved before individuals become aware of other potentially dividing differences. Users are therefore able to avert these differences, by simply presenting themselves in a selective manner.

2.7.1) Impression management

Previous international studies have demonstrated that individuals can and do form impressions through activities on computer mediated communication – such as social networking sites like Facebook (Tom Tong et al.; 2008). It is said that language style and content, photographic and biographic information as well as friendship networks all play a role in impression management online (Tanis 2003 and Walter 2006 *cited in* Tom Tong et al.; 2008). Krämer et al. (2008) and Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) similarly indicate that the creation of online self-representations allow users the opportunity to decide which aspects

of their personalities should be presented as well as which photographs convey the best images. They are therefore more strategically able to manage their self-representation compared to interactions which happen face-to-face.

In research conducted by Krämer et al. (2008) in Germany, it was found that three personality traits were shown to influence impression management as well as self-presentation online. These behaviours include self-esteem, extroversion and self-efficacy. Extroverted individuals seem to share more elaborate self-representations online compared to shy individuals (Marcus et al.; 2006 *cited in* Krämer et al.; 2008). Whereas those who are in need of elevated self-esteem usually strive to promote a positive self-representation online and will therefore present themselves in a positive light online (Krämer et al.; 2008). Finally, Krämer et al (2008) identify self-efficacy as the final determinant for impression management online. According to Bandura (1997) *cited in* Krämer et al. (2008), self-efficacy refers to the optimistic beliefs about one's own abilities. Krämer et al. (2008) continues to explain that efficacy of self-presentation in social situations is an important determinant for successful impression management as individuals can only act successfully once they have experienced themselves as being accomplished and in control. Therefore, they are comfortable in taking risks in terms of the information they choose to share as well as how they choose to share it.

Increased wall-postings allude to sociable behaviour and therefore result in favourable ratings by peers and the size of an individual's friendship network indicates their popularity and promotes positive social judgments (Tom Tong et al.; 2008). In research conducted by Tom Tong et al. (2008), it was found that individuals that are perceived as being socially popular online, were also perceived as being more socially dominant in social interactions. It seems therefore, that both positive experiences and perceptions online are mirrored in the user's perception of reality. This finding is not surprising considering how closely linked adolescents' online realities are to their real worlds and their day to day functioning.

2.8) Conclusion

In this chapter, evidence is presented regarding Facebook's popularity amongst adolescents as well as the effects of Facebook on adolescent self-esteem and self-perception.

The fact that much of the information alluded to in the literature review was specifically focused on students of a university age and not necessarily between the adolescent ages of 13 – 18 years. This clearly indicates the need for further research in this specific demographic.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the above literature review, the rate at which adolescents use online social networks such as Facebook, as well as the manner in which they are used, is changing at a rapid pace. It is evident that ongoing research is necessary in order to obtain a more current understanding of this behavioural trend and its implications.

Additionally, majority of the literature referred to above is rooted in studies that have been conducted internationally. This places emphasis on the fact that very limited research is available on studies conducted within a South African and African context. Ongoing research within these local contexts will be important in order to understand the current realities of local adolescents and the development of their self-esteem.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1) Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will present all methodology used in the study. This includes discussions and explanations regarding the research design, research questions and objectives, population and sampling methods used, as well as the research process that was employed during the capture and analysis of the data. It concludes with the examination of possible limitations affecting the study.

3.2) Research methodology

3.2.1) Research paradigm

Schurink (*cited in* De Vos; 1998) and Babbie and Mouton (2010) explain that qualitative research is specifically useful when trying to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human interactions. This is due to the fact that qualitative research is by definition a research method that attempts to describe and interpret people's feelings and experiences, social situations and phenomena in human terms; rather than through measurement and quantification (Terre Blanche, Kerry and Durrheim *cited in* Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter; 2006 and De Vos; 1998) achieved through quantitative research.

This is evident in research conducted by Spears et al. (2009), where the qualitative research paradigm was employed in order to gain a more in-depth and personalised account of cyber-bullying in the Australian school context. Due to the rapid changes in psychological and emotional development during adolescence, as well as the fact that online social networking usage is so personalized, the same paradigm was employed in this research. This assisted in providing the researcher with age specific data (i.e.: early adolescent (13 year

old) experiences, feelings and thoughts as well as more mature, 18 year old adolescent experiences, feelings and thoughts). It also assisted in providing data that clearly reflects participants personal thoughts and feelings on the subject, thereby providing descriptive results which were then analysed.

3.2.2) Research design

3.2.2.1) Explorative design

According to Mouton and Marais (1990) *cited in* De Vos (1998) the objective of an exploratory study is to examine an area of research about which relatively limited information is known. The purpose is then to uncover generalisations and develop hypotheses which can be investigated and tested with further data gathering techniques.

The researcher has chosen use of the explorative research design, as this research is focused on looking at the realities and opinions of the adolescent research participants. The usage of this design facilitated the exploration of issues of interest and also assisted the researcher in understanding the issues that underlie Facebook usage amongst the participants.

According to De Vos (1998) and Terre Blanche et al. (2006) a semi structured interview schedule provides the researcher with a guideline for the interview. This guideline contains questions and themes which are important in terms of the research being conducted. The use of a schedule ensures that all relevant topics are covered and explored during each conducted interview. The use of the said interview schedule assisted the researcher in making sure all relevant areas were explored during each interview.

Whilst most studies regarding online social networking use usually employ research designs which transpire online, such as surveys, questionnaires and online video diaries (Mesch et al.; 2010; Spears et al.; 2009; Tom Tong et al.; 2008; Valkenburg et al.; 2006; and Ahn; 2011), the researcher was determined

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to ensure her data collection allowed for the exploration and understanding of dynamics, which is achievable through explorative research designs such as case studies.

3.2.2.2) Case study

Due to the fact that the conducted research is situated in a particular context at a particular High School in Cape Town, with a particular sample, the research design implemented can also be described as a case study.

Tripodi (1981) *cited in* De Vos (1998) explains that a case study is performed when a researcher is looking to thoroughly describe a single unit during a specific period in time. This is referred to as a one-shot case study (De Vos; 1998). Terre Blanche et al. (2006) describes it as an intensive investigation of particular individuals or units.

The sampling process involved in this type of design is purposive rather than random (De Vos; 1998), as specific details and descriptions are sought, rather than random generalisations. This idea will be expanded upon in the 'sampling' section of the research methodology discussion. The advantage of using such sampling techniques in case studies revolves around the fact that the specific descriptions and details provided by the sample, assist in the development of new ideas and hypotheses as a result of the detailed observations (Terre Blanche et al.; 2006).

Previous research conducted by Steinfield et al. (2008) looking at the longitudinal analysis of online social networking use, used a similar research design, conducting in-depth face to face interviews with their relevant sample. They explained that the use of explorative case studies through face-to-face interviews assisted in the development of quotations, which further assisted in producing rich data and extensive research findings. The researcher sees this as motivation for both the explorative and case study research designs to be employed for this research.

3.3) Research topic, question and objectives

3.3.1) Research Topic

As previously mentioned, the effects of online media on adolescent self-esteem is a relatively untapped field. This, together with the increasing influence of online media usage, warrant further investigation around the topic. In order to do so, the following research question was proposed:

3.3.2) Research question

Does online social networking through Facebook have an effect on adolescent self-esteem?

3.3.3) Research objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- f) To determine what motivates adolescents to use the social networking site Facebook as their chosen form of social networking.
- g) To ascertain what determines adolescents' level of disclosure of personal information on the social networking site Facebook.
- h) To identify how the social networking site Facebook contributes to a positive self-esteem.
- i) To identify how the social networking site Facebook contributes to a negative self-esteem.
- j) To determine the differences between adolescents' online representation of themselves compared to reality.

3.4) Population

Patton (1990) *cited in* De Vos (2008) denotes that when data is collected through the qualitative approach, the researcher must ensure that the sample group from which the data emanates must provide rich descriptions of the field being analysed.

The target population for this study is a High School in the Atlantic Seaboard area of Cape. Of this population, 15 students who are active Facebook users were chosen as research participants. This was achieved through purposive sampling, whereby participants that were most likely to provide information rich data were interviewed.

As a result of this requirement, all adolescent participants interviewed are required to have active Facebook accounts that are used on a regular basis (this usage will most likely fluctuate from participant to participant, however the average participant was required to access the site several times a week).

3.5) Sampling

Additionally snowball sampling was used, as it allowed the researcher access to participants who were willing to participate in the research and therefore, would assist in the referral process. Durrheim and Painter (*cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006) explain that snowball sampling involves gradually accumulating a sample through contacts and references. For the purposes of this research, referrals via research participants to their peers allowed the sample to grow via peer-to-peer, word-of-mouth referrals.

The sample size was limited to fifteen participants. This is considered an appropriate sized sample for a minor dissertation. Additionally, the researcher felt this sized sample group allowed for the opportunity to conduct in-depth, explorative interviews. It was felt that a smaller sample size could provide richer data than a larger sample with a rushed interview process.

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Finally in terms of the sample, it is important that the researcher take into account the different age, sex, income, gender, racial and religious groups within the school. The researcher believes that each one of these criteria might influence the way in which a research participant might use the social networking site, Facebook. For example, it has been suggested by Mikami et al. (2010) that there is a female gender predominance with regard to social communication online. Similarly, the researcher believes the same can be said for the norms and values attached to different religious groups i.e.: Religious participants might not believe in updating their status with social information, rather believing that religious thoughts **should** not be shared online. If the majority of the participants were religious and felt this way, it would not reflect the average adolescent's views. Therefore, when choosing research participants – it was imperative that a balance regarding the defining demographics of the research participants were taken into account in order to avoid this kind of bias.

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3.6) Data collection

3.6.1) Data collection method

The data for this study was gathered by means of semi-structured face to face interviews. Research schedules were used in each interview so that questions posed were regulated throughout all interviews. According to Schurink *cited in* De Vos (1998), this form of interviewing necessitates the researcher to guide the conversation, reflect and clarify throughout the interview, whilst remaining passive, in order to obtain rich and relevant information.

3.6.2) Data collection instrument

In this study the researcher made use of an interview schedule (please refer to Appendix A for interview schedule). Kelly *cited in* Terre Blanche et al. (2006) describes the interview schedule as a document developed by the researcher where key topics and sub-topics are prepared. These topics are then used to guide the conversation throughout the data collection process. Schurink *cited in*

De Vos (1998) expands on this idea and adds that it also assists in the systematic collection of data, making sure that no questions or areas of research are forgotten during the interview process. In essence, making it a predetermined order of questions that are standard throughout all interviews (Babbie and Mouton; 2010).

The interview schedule for this research consisted of the following 6 parts:

Part one of the interview schedule related to the participants' demographic information. It compiled information regarding participants' age, grade, race, gender and religion. The purpose of collecting such information was to provide a comprehensive description of the participants participating in the study. It also allowed an opportunity to explain the confidentiality agreement – ensuring that participants felt protected throughout the process. This will be, in part, achieved by using pseudonyms throughout the research.

Part two of the interview schedule focused on the participants' motivation with regards to using the social networking site, Facebook. This section comprised eight sub-questions. Questions were targeted to obtain the following information: how much time participants spent on Facebook, how the website is accessed, motivating incentives to use Facebook and participants' opinions of their friends. The questionnaire format allowed participants an opportunity to discuss the incentives around using Facebook as their social networking site of choice as well as explain the benefits around its use.

Part three of the interview schedule explores the disclosure determinants with regard to communication through Facebook. In this section questions were aimed at elucidating the types of information that are typically revealed by participants on Facebook, how often participants updated information about themselves online as well as how information shared was chosen as being worthy of disclosure on the Facebook website.

Part four of the interview schedule reflected on Facebook and its effects on adolescent self-esteem. This section was divided into two sub-sections: namely Facebook and its promotion of positive self-esteem and Facebook and its promotion of negative self-esteem. Both sub-sections allowed participants to explore and discuss both the positive and negative effects they had experienced in terms of their own self-esteem as well as what they had been witness to amongst their friends.

Part five of the interview schedule consisted of three sub-sections which all dealt with comparing the differences between online self-presentation and reality. Ideas regarding why participants and their peers might feel the need to change the way in which they presented themselves online as well as which aspects of themselves participants and their peers specifically chose to change or enhance online were explored. This allowed participants to reflect on their own experiences and distinguish the benefits and drawbacks of communicating through the online networking site, Facebook.

The final section of the interview schedule, part six, dealt with the transition into the closing of the interview. Here, the researcher was able to maintain rapport whilst thanking the participants for their participation.

3.6.2.1) Piloting of interview schedule

Babbie and Mouton (2010) highlight that a pilot study provides the researcher with an opportunity to acquire knowledge regarding literature on the topic being researched, use the experience of previous experts on the subject as a guide for their own research and allows the researcher the opportunity to conduct preliminary exploratory interviews in order to assess the execution of their proposed research. In essence, it provides the researcher with a basis for evaluating their data collection procedures.

This is an important part of the research process. Consequently pilot interviews were conducted at a High School in Cape Town where two participants matching

the required criteria for the research were interviewed. This entailed both interviewees being between the ages of 13 – 18 as well as ensuring they were active Facebook users. The interviews were guided by the use of the semi-structured interview schedule and were voice-recorded. This allowed the researcher to monitor the flow and pace of the interviews, as well as an opportunity to test out her recording procedure. It also provided the researcher an invaluable opportunity to ensure that her questions and interview schedule were easily understandable and allowed the time for specific topics to be discussed, explored and reflected on.

Conducting the pilot study provided the researcher an opportunity to re-address concerns regarding time management during the interviews as well as re-look at the flow of the interview schedule. Ultimately resulting in a more concise but detailed interview schedule and therefore, a smoother flowing interview.

3.6.3) Data collection apparatus

A cellular telephone with Dictaphone functionality was used to record research participants and their responses. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to focus on non-verbal communication, which was then reflected on during the interview – facilitating the development of rich data.

3.7) Data analysis

Since this study is qualitative in nature, the data collected was analysed according to Tesch's eight steps (Poggenpoel *cited in* De Vos; 1998). The following steps, based on Tesch's original steps (Poggenpoel *cited in* De Vos; 1998) were employed:

1. The researcher read through the completed transcriptions in order to gain a sense of the information data received. Some thoughts regarding the information were noted.

2. The most interesting interview was selected and read through. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to begin looking at the underlying meanings behind the interview. Labels and notes were made and relevant passages from the text, highlighted.
3. After reading a few more transcriptions in a similar manner, a list of similar topics were clustered together. These were compared to the original research objectives and main themes and thereafter ordered into major topics, unique topics and snippets of interesting data.
4. The topics were then assigned corresponding numbers. The researcher then returned to the data and wrote the corresponding numbers next to the appropriate segments of text. This assisted in organizing the information and making the different sections of information easily identifiable. Thereafter they were then highlighted into different colours – once again assisting in making the information easily distinguishable as well as assisting to see whether new categories and codes had emerged.
5. The researcher then attempted to see if topics could be grouped together in order to decrease the total amount of categories. This also assisted in highlighting links and similarities between the different categories.
6. Categories were then organized so that the information gathered from them flowed logically between each section.
7. The preliminary analysis was then performed allowing an opportunity for the researcher to ensure no valuable information was overlooked.
8. Any information that was discounted was then reinstated and recoded.

This process was repeated until the researcher was confident that all the significant information had been found from the data.

3.8) Data verification

According to Babbie and Mouton (2010) these are elements which enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research and are vital when ensuring the research's validity (De Vos; 1998). Guba's approach (Lincoln and Guba; 1985), cited in Babbie and Mouton (2010) and De Vos (1998), identifies four main

components that assist in ensuring trustworthiness of data and the diminishment of bias. These are namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and will be expanded upon below.

3.8.1) Credibility

This component is supposed to demonstrate that the research was conducted in a way that ensures that the subject matter being researched is accurately identified and defined (De Vos; 1998). Babbie and Mouton (2010) similarly explain that this component aims to ensure that the researcher accurately describes the research participants' thoughts and opinions in the study.

For the current research, the researcher will ensure credibility by voice-recording all interviews with a Dictaphone. The recordings will verify that all interviews took place under the correct circumstances.

3.8.2) Transferability

De Vos (1998) and Babbie and Mouton (2010) both explain that this component refers to whether or not the findings for the current research can be replicated in other contexts, or with different participants.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research design, the researcher will endeavor to provide rich, in-depth and specific data from a purposive sample. This will then be reported in the research document, allowing readers to make their own judgments based on the findings.

3.8.3) Dependability

"The third strategy is that of dependability, in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions to the phenomenon chosen for research as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting" (De Vos; 1998; 351). Babbie and Mouton (2010) expand on this idea and

explain that it also refers to whether or not the research results will remain constant if it were to be replicated in a similar context with similar participants.

The researcher has attempted to base her research on different aspects of similar studies run internationally over the last few years, ensuring that all research remains current. According to Lincoln and Guba (1984), “there can be no validity without reliability, and thus no credibility without dependability” *cited in* Babbie and Mouton (2010; 278). Consequently, if the researcher’s credibility and literature reviews are sound, the study should be dependable.

3.8.4) Confirmability

This is the final strategy in the verification process and places emphasis on the evaluation of the data and the quality of such evaluations (De Vos; 1998). In this study, the researcher will report on all significant data – while casting her own beliefs and biases aside. This will ensure the data is reflective of the research participants’ thoughts and feelings, ensuring its validity. Additionally, the researcher will ensure that she keeps all documentation related to her research process including: analysis products, instrument development products and voice recordings. This will be done to confirm the validity of her findings should they be questioned in future.

3.9) Limitations of the study

Limitations exist in all research studies (De Vos; 1998). As a result, the researcher needs to be aware of all potential limitations and make a note to clearly state them. In terms of the current research, an important limitation has been the lack of previous studies with regards to online social networking in the South African context. This gap in knowledge is even larger when one considers information regarding adolescent South Africans, as is the sample population for this research. As a result, majority of the literature used throughout this research is linked to studies focusing on international research – with majority of this research focusing on the young adult/university student populations

rather than the adolescent populations. Additionally, research regarding the social networking site Facebook is also a relatively new area of research. In order for the researcher to ensure that the research and literature referenced within the research is the most current, in some cases, she has had to look at the broader realm of online social networking sites, looking at sites equivalent to Facebook (such as myspace). These two factors indicate the importance of the current research and will hopefully assist in the advancement of knowledge in the South African context as well as inform future research.

In the section that follows, the researcher will discuss the possible limitations affecting this study. These will be discussed in relation to the research design, sampling, data collection method, data collection instrument, data analysis and the researcher.

3.9.1) Research design

The qualitative research design involves the researcher using the self as an instrument for data capturing and analysis (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly *cited in* Terre Blanche et al.; 2006). The aim of this is to gain insight into the subjective experiences of participants in order to advance the knowledge pertaining to the research topic (Babbie and Mouton; 2010).

Not only does this require that the researcher, as the interviewer, use her skills of active listening and interpretation to gain data which is as rich as possible, without active bias, but if not carried out in the correct fashion, might result in the research participants feeling uncomfortable during the interview process (De Vos; 1998). These limitations might result in a reduction of the gathering of in-depth and honest data, which could ultimately influence the validity of the information gained.

In order to avoid these limitations, the researcher will ensure that her professional skills relating to maintaining an environment of safety and non-judgment are maintained. She will also ensure that each participant is aware

that confidentiality will always be upheld. These techniques will hopefully ensure honesty and participation resulting in the capture of rich data.

3.9.2) Sampling

For research to be generalizable, it needs to reveal results on a significant portion of the population affected by the research topic (De Vos; 1998). As previously mentioned in this research, snowball sampling was employed in order to enlist a small sample into the research process. As a result of the sample being small in size, its limitation is that it is not necessarily representative of other populations or generalizable to other contexts. Consequently the research should rather be considered as exploratory research looking at new phenomena within the specific population, rather than as a generalizable research finding. Kelly (2006) explains that in exploratory research, the sample should always cover a range of cases, in as much depth as is needed, so that one has a clear understanding of the field. In this research, an attempt has been made to cover a range of adolescent participants, utilizing a sample made up of different ages, races, religions and income groups. Even though the researcher has attempted to include a wide range of participants, the sample size is still much too small to make the results generalizable. However, if evidence is found that the phenomena behind adolescents' interactions and the effects on their self-esteem are indeed valid, then the research should serve as a strong motivation to repeat the study on a greater scale and with more specific focus.

3.9.3) Data collection method

Data will be gathered through face to face interviews. Kelly *cited in* Terre Blanche et al. (2006) explains that questions during the interview process need to be thought out carefully as failure to do so could result in limitations related to data collection. It is suggested that the researcher ensure that there are not too many questions; that closed, leading, excessively probing and that poorly timed questions are all avoided, as these types of questions will affect the

authenticity of participants' responses. An attempt has been made to take heed of these potential limitations by the researcher, by conducting pilot interviews to ensure the data collection runs smoothly.

3.9.4) Data collection instrument

De Vos (1998) advises that when a researcher decides on a specific data collection method, they ensure that it is considered valid and reliable. The use of an interview schedule promotes these two concepts, however, it can become restricting if it is adhered to too closely.

Additionally, an attempt at avoiding the difficulties relating to the limitations regarding the chosen data collection apparatus has been made. A cellular telephone with dictaphone functionality has been tested to ensure it is in working order. However, the researcher is aware that participants who may be shy, feel intimidated or speak softly may create added difficulty. In these cases, the researcher will attempt to make the participants more relaxed and comfortable by reflecting on the process and ensuring confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms, addressing any of the concerns they may have and placing the cellular telephone in a position that makes the participant more at ease.

3.9.5) Data analysis

Due to the researcher having very limited past experience in the research process, difficulties might arise during the data collection, analysis and write-up processes. An attempt will be made to circumvent these limitations by following research frameworks as well as relying on the supervision of her research supervisor should any queries arise.

3.9.6) The researcher

Due to the fact that the researcher has worked at a High School and seen the impact of social networking on adolescent self-esteem first-hand, as well as the fact that she herself is a Facebook user might act as limitations during the research process. Especially if her preconceived ideas, assumptions and biases affect her judgment during the process (De Vos; 1998). To combat these potential limitations, it will be imperative that the researcher remain aware of them, and remain tuned in to her thoughts and emotions throughout the process. Being open and honest regarding her assumptions will assist in making the process more transparent. Furthermore, guidance from her research supervisor will ensure the provision of advice and support when necessary.

3.10) Conclusion

In this chapter, a detailed presentation of the research methodology selected for this study was presented and motivated. This chapter sets the background for the presentation of the research findings and discussions in chapters to follow.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1) Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will present the findings of the study. The aim of the research conducted was to explore the effects of social networking on adolescent self-esteem, with the focus of the study primarily being on the social networking site, Facebook. Research was conducted according to the qualitative framework. The chosen research method utilized semi-structured interview schedules where sixteen interviews took place over a two week period in a 'Model C' Cape Town based High School. Following the interviews, only fifteen of the interviews were transcribed as one was inaudible. Respondents included a spectrum of racial, income and religious groupings.

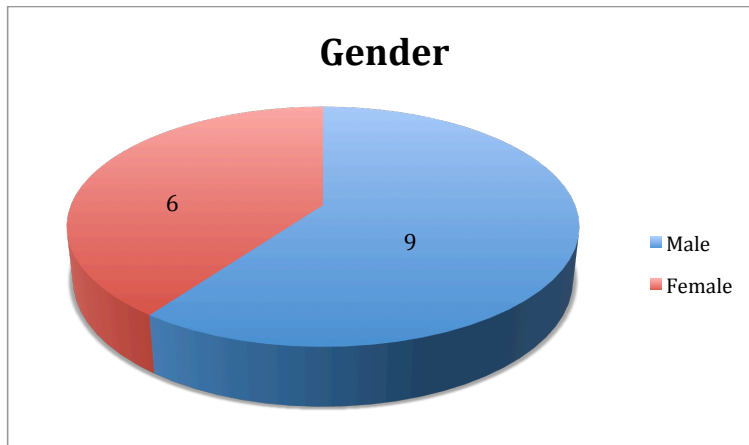
The data collected will be presented according to Tesch's (1990) data analysis design. This involved creating a framework of analysis and has resulted in the themes and categories which will be presented throughout this research findings chapter. Following the presentation of each theme, the relevant categories will be discussed. The five themes included in this analysis will pay special attention to the following areas: Motivation behind Facebook use; Disclosure determinants when sharing information online; Facebook and the promotion of positive self-esteem; Facebook and the promotion of negative self-esteem as well as presentation of self online versus reality, in alignment with the research questions of the study.

4.2) Demographics

This section provides a demographic profile of the research participants. The demographic profile is categorised according to gender, race, grade and age, and will be presented over the next few pages with the assistance of pie charts.

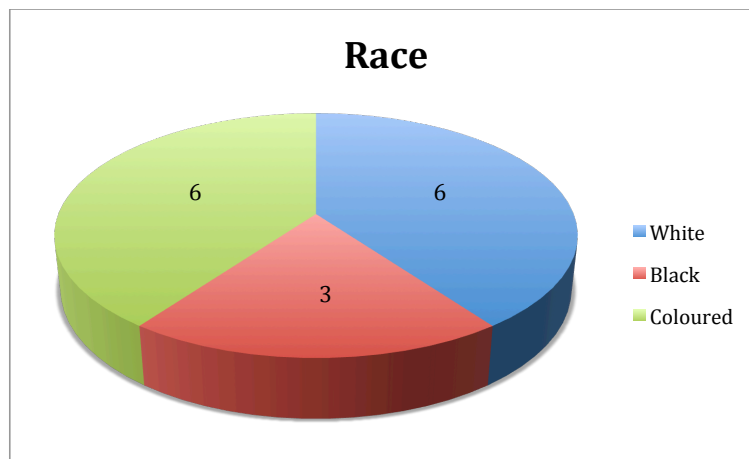
judyf 13/1/14 8:11 AM
Comment [8]: "s" or "z" consistency

4.2.1) Gender



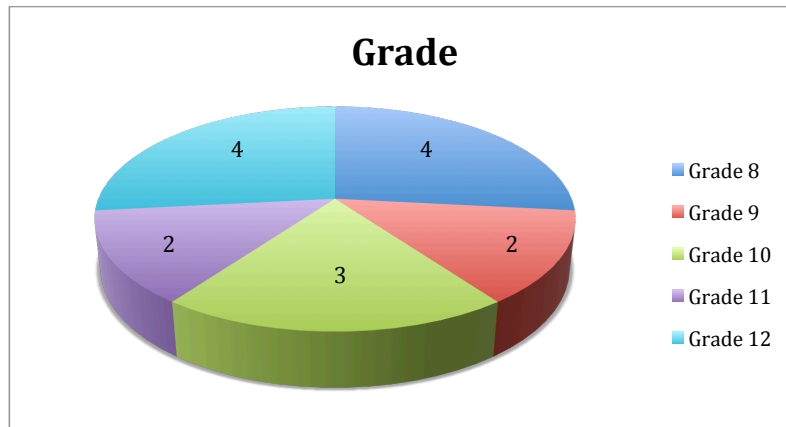
Out of the total of fifteen participants nine were male and six were female.

4.2.2) Race



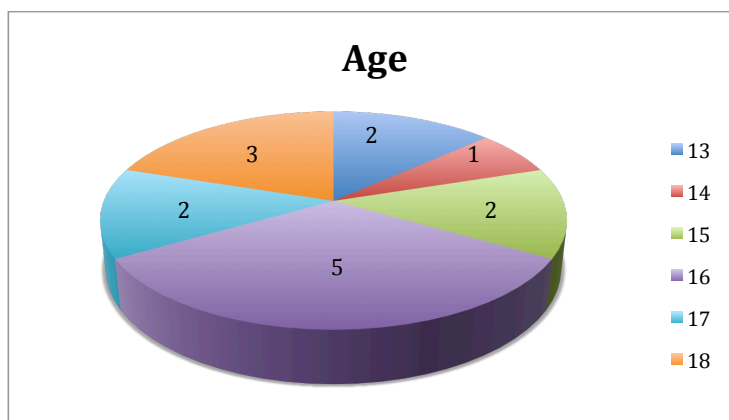
From a racial perspective, six participants were White, six participants were Coloured, and three participants were Black.

4.2.3) Grade



An majority of participants (four) were in both Grades eight and twelve. During the sampling process the dominance of the two Grades were ensured as the researcher believed the age gap between the two sets of participants would highlight some of the key issues around self-esteem development. This was spurred on by the knowledge that maturity levels and self-perception are known to change dramatically between these developmental years and as a result might have an impact on the effect Facebook has on the participants self-esteem. There were an additional three participants from Grade ten and two participants from both Grades nine and eleven.

4.2.4) Age



The majority of the sample were in mid-adolescence, with the mean age of the population being 15,87. At this age it is to be expected that participants' beliefs and attitudes regarding Facebook and its effects on self-esteem are directly linked to their developmental stage.

4.3) Framework of analysis

The framework of analysis provided by Tesch (1990), which guided the data analysis process, resulted in the development of different categories and sub-categories. These are presented in the following table.

INTERVIEW THEMES	CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES ARISING FROM DATA ANALYSIS
4.4) Theme 1: Motivation to use Facebook	4.4.1) Communication and interaction with others 4.4.1.1) Keep up to date with friends' activities and information 4.4.1.2) Explore and share photographs and events 4.4.2) Ease of access
4.5) Theme 2: Disclosure determinants	4.5.1) Privacy and safety 4.5.2) Cyber-bullying
4.6) Theme 3: Facebook and promotion of positive self-esteem	4.6.1) Attention and acknowledgement 4.6.2) Interaction
4.7) Theme 4: Facebook and promotion of negative self-esteem	4.7.1) Negative feedback and cyber bullying 4.7.2) Decreased privacy and gossip
4.8) Theme 5: Online presentations Vs. Reality	4.8.1) Ideal-self presentation 4.8.2) Popularity 4.8.3) Avoidance of sharing negative or unflattering information

The following section will expand upon the above themes, categories and sub-categories.

4.4) Theme 1: Motivation to use Facebook

Facebook's popularity and growth amongst the world's population has been exponential. In 2007, the 30-millionth user joined the Facebook network (Joinson et al. 2008) and in 2008 Facebook released statistics that indicated that there were over 61 million active users (Nosko et al. 2010). In 2012, there were over one billion active users worldwide (www.facebook.com).

In this theme, the factors arising from the data captured, that motivate participants to use Facebook as their chosen form of online communication, will be individually explored. The category relating to communication and interaction with others will include the sub-categories of keeping up to date with friends' activities and information, as well as the exploring and sharing of photographs and events. The final category to be discussed will deal with accessibility and is entitled "Easy access".

4.4.1) Communication and interaction with others:

Data relevant to this research area indicated that all participants (fifteen out of the fifteen) clearly identified Facebook as being their social networking site of choice with regard to communicating and interacting with friends online. Although other platforms such as Blackberry messenger, Mxit and Whatsapp were mentioned, Facebook remained the most popular amongst participants. This suggests that their motivation to use Facebook as their primary form of online communication is high. Motivating factors as indicated by participants included the ease at which they are able to communicate with peers and family who did not live nearby. This included those who live in different suburbs, cities and countries. The following personal expressions underpin the above mentioned motivating factor:

"It's basically the first social network where you are able to contact everyone really, I mean I have friends there (on Facebook) who are from my old school who I haven't seen in ages like childhood friends...so I'm able to connect with them..."
(Brandon)

"Well, I like to stay in contact with my family overseas like in Australia and stuff and New York and stuff...but I do use it sometimes to see what's going on with my friends and stuff and to contact them...you know...like if they're out of contact and say I don't go to the same school as me then I'll speak to them through Facebook" (Melissa)

"(I use it) To connect with other people that might live overseas or who you can't get on Mxit or you know something like gmail...so they connect on Facebook" (Saadiq)

These findings are corroborated by research done by university students in the United States of America. Here, results unearthed by Lampe et al. (2007) also indicated that university students' primary purpose for using Facebook was to remain in contact with old friends from other schools as well as old acquaintances. Although this finding may not directly relate to adolescents in general, the personal responses of the research participants indicate that their main reasons for utilizing Facebook are in fact very similar to the university sample from Lampe et al's. (2007) research.

The data received indicates that the participants' motivation to use Facebook is directly related to the fact that it provides them with the ability to create and maintain large networks of 'friends' with ease. These large networks of friends, as described by the participants – consisting of both peers and family – enhance their feelings of social acceptance. At times, these networks may provide support and can also be used for advice seeking and other resources. The feeling

of being connected and accepted by peers is universally accepted as a vital part of positive self-esteem development during adolescence.

The psycho-social theory of development as described by Erikson (1986) *cited in* Cole et al. (2001) explains that during the adolescent years, individuals experience the process of mastering the developmental task of identity formation. The identity, once formed, will assist the individual in the development of their ego, which in turn, will result in the defences used in order to navigate their world. If the task is not successfully completed, the individual will run the risk of remaining confused regarding their place in society. During this time of self-exploration, the interaction with peers and the development of a sense of belonging that this form of interaction provides, assists in the shaping of an individual's identity. Keeping this theory in mind, it is unsurprising, that communication and interaction with others is one of the strongest motivating factors and is essentially the crux of Facebook's online popularity amongst the adolescent participants.

4.4.1.1) Keep up to date with friends' activities and information:

Majority of participants (eleven out of fifteen) indicated that one of Facebook's most significant features is that it allows one to keep informed of friends' activities. Regular and updated information concerning their activities and information provides a feeling of being connected and socially included. The importance of being connected is reflected by Sheldon et al. (2011) who claim that the more an individual uses Facebook, the more connected they feel to their social circle. This idea has its roots in object relations theory, proposed by Klein (1987) who conceived the idea that the need for human relationships is seen as the motivator for most behaviour, where early relationships with one's mother will shape how an individual will come to understand the world.

In the same vein, but in more current times, Pempek et al. (2009) describe how the feelings of social satisfaction, inclusion and acceptance triggered by Facebook use are influential predictors of good psychological and physical well-

being. They acknowledge that many of the activities promoted on Facebook are related to the development of social connectedness and feelings of acceptance.

During adolescence, individuals display a strong desire for group-belonging (Berk; 2006). Facebook provides this opportunity. Facebook provides easy access to keeping in touch with friends and their news, which in turn propagates feelings of inclusion:

"I use Facebook coz everybody has Facebook and I also wanted Facebook so I can know what everybody else is talking about"
(Zareena)

"I use it to communicate, see what up and coming events are happening and I want to know what's going on with everyone else" (Eric)

"To keep updated...because if I went to school and everyone is talking about something that happened and I don't know what they're talking about and then I'll be sitting there not knowing what's going on and I'll feel left out. So ya..." (Bulumko)

These statements concur with previous research conducted by Martínez Alemán and Wartman (2009) who also found that Facebook's popularity is a direct result of the feelings of connectedness and belonging that Facebook renders to its users. Oyserman *cited in* Brewer and Hewstone (2004) explains that often individuals form their self-concept through their experiences, which are related to the context of their relationships as well as their position within a social group.

Therefore, if an adolescent is seen to be knowledgeable regarding information about others amongst their peers, one might assume they were both socially-connected and accepted. The resulting notion is that feelings of social acceptance

increase self-esteem, whereas being uninformed might result in decreases in self-esteem as well as possible social isolation.

The researcher believes the data bears out the researcher's experience that the participants' motivation to use the social networking site, Facebook, is driven by the sense of inclusiveness that Facebook affords its users and by the resultant favourable effects on self-esteem. This motivates continued use of the website so that the participants remain informed, feel as though they are socially accepted and ultimately, feel more positive about themselves.

4.4.1.2) Explore and share photographs and events

Thirteen of the fifteen participants indicated that in order to remain informed regarding friends' activities as well as to keep in contact with both friends and family, activities often included tasks relating to both the exploration and sharing of photographs and events. For example, participants indicated that creating an event on Facebook, such as a party, made it much simpler to share the details of the event with a larger audience. In addition to this, being a guest at an event and having an awareness of possible attendees was indicated as being of assistance to participants, especially when they had to decide whether or not to attend an event. According to their responses, decisions regarding attendance are often based on whether or not one knows or likes the people on the attendance list. Possible safety concerns about the proposed venue were also indicated as being a concern which could be alleviated through the information provided regarding the event. Respondents also indicated that certain types of information posted online about the event, such as photographs taken or status updates referring to the event, were often used to determine whether or not an event was a success or failure. This could reflect favourably or unfavourably on the event host, in terms of perceptions of popularity, which in turn might affect the host's self-esteem. The following statements reflect the adolescents' views:

" It's (Facebook's) also a platform to share things about your personal lives, like you upload photos and clips of what parties

you're gonna go to and it's just a convenient way to arrange things and see what's happening in other people's worlds really...a lot of times I'll get invited to an event and then if I'm worried about the spot, I can decide if I like it and see which of my friends is attending and then organize with them or meet up there." (Brandon)

"I would definitely tag people in my status after a good party coz...I don't know...just to show...just to share what kind of night you had or something. Generally a lot, like a lot of people do that" (Eric)

"It's interesting to know afterwards how something was or ya, coz like if you didn't go, coz that's like why I read other people's statuses...coz like oh, I wanna know how it was". (Thenjiwe)

Research conducted by Joinson (2008), indicated that social connection gratification tended to lead to increased frequency of website use and that similarly, when content was gratifying, increased time was spent on it. Additionally, 'social-searching' as described by Joinson (2008), or 'lurking' (Pempek et al.; 2009) allows adolescents to keep in contact with peers through a form of surveillance, allowing them to remain informed without necessarily having to maintain contact.

The importance as per participants, of being knowledgeable regarding peers' activities and events is clearly indicated in the aforementioned quotes. The data illustrates that the crux of this finding has its roots in the adolescent need to be socially included. As Joinson (2008) indicates, the need to be socially included as well as the gratification the information accumulation provides, motivates Facebook usage. Additionally, the data indicates that the gratification received from being socially included helps elevates the participants' self-esteem, which not only motivates, but also positively reinforces Facebook usage.

Therefore, this finding concurs with previous research conducted by Joinson (2008) and Pempek et al. (2009) regarding the motivation to use Facebook in order to both explore and share photographs and remain informed regarding peers' activities.

4.4.2) Ease of access:

Data collected indicates that thirteen of the fifteen participants regularly use both computers and cellular telephones to access their Facebook profiles. Four of the thirteen owning smart phones, such as Blackberrys and iPhones, are permanently logged on to their Facebook profiles. This means that any activity on their profile, such as wall posts or notifications, is visible instantly to the adolescent, they are thereby able to keep updated regularly by checking their phones. During data collection, participants were specifically probed as to what their favourite means of accessing Facebook is, as well as how often they access it. Respondents indicated the following:

"I access it (Facebook) on either my Blackberry or computer. I'm constantly logged on with my Blackberry but if I see I've got a notification, I will go on instantly...so you could say all the time but otherwise, if I use my computer then maybe twice a day" (Brandon)

"Like in the morning, on my phone when I'm in the taxi on the way to school and I just go on Facebook and then later when I get back home on the computer. " (Sihle)

"I use my laptop and my cell phone...(laughs)...quite often." (Mark)

The high percentage of participants who use both computers and cellular telephones to access the Facebook website concurs with previous literature which states that web usage is changing dramatically (Mikami et al. 2010).

Adolescents live in an online reality (Alemán et al. 2009) whereby, through the use of their smart phones, they are permanently connected without any supervision.

The data supports the conclusion that the implications of this reality are problematic for the development of an adolescent's positive self-esteem. The data reflects that the participants interviewed are highly motivated to use the website due to its ease of access but also, as a result of its ease of access are using it to compare themselves with each other through this medium. The motivation to keep up to date and in fashion with what peers are doing and the anxiety that not doing this may cause is an area the data indicates that require additional research.

In the following section, disclosure determinants will be discussed.

4.5) Theme 2: Disclosure determinants

The success of online social networking websites such as Facebook relies heavily on the fact that members of society use the website to share information about themselves. Mesch and Beker (2010), as well as Nosko, Wood and Molema (2009), clarify that the purposeful disclosure of personal information assists in reducing uncertainty around the lack of personal and contextual information provided by Facebook. The exploration of shared information in addition to the continued sharing of information on Facebook, as highlighted in the previous section, has proven to be a fundamental motivating factor for continued Facebook use, thereby providing users with a sense of connectedness and belonging.

In the analysis of how participants choose what information they decide to share as well as how they wish to unveil that information, data collected indicates that two main factors play an integral part, namely concerns around privacy and safety, and cyber-bullying. In this section, these two areas will be explored and discussed.

4.5.1) Privacy and safety

Analysis of the data indicated that twelve of the fifteen participants interviewed expressed that privacy and safety were both primary concerns when it came to choosing what information was suitable for disclosure online.

Altman (1977), Joinson and Paine (2007) cited in Mesch and Beker (2010) explain that "Privacy is about personal information, its control and its disclosure" (Mesch and Beker;2010; 571). The key area affected by online communication through Facebook is the notion of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure refers to the information individuals decide to share with others.

Respondents indicated that they are aware of the public nature of sharing information online and that by sharing information they are effectively making the information available to other Facebook users. On average participants interviewed have an average of two hundred and fifty 'friends' on their Facebook profiles. Consequently, the majority of participants indicated that sharing information that is too personal in nature is often avoided, due to safety concerns with 'friend' groups that are uniformly large in number. Added to this concern, it was indicated that the majority of participants are aware that once information is shared online, amongst friends, their friends may choose to continue sharing the information with their peer group. Therefore, the exposure of such shared information might grow exponentially. The following statements indicate the adolescents' concerns:

"It really comes down to the fact – do you really want everyone who is on your Facebook account to know everything. Like you know, if I had an argument with my mom, it's not really relevant for me to share on Facebook. I mean, she has Facebook and will then be able to see and then people start asking questions...so...it really depends on what the situation is. Ummm....but I mean you obviously have to think about what you do out there...coz what you

put out there is in the public domain so they do know about it. So you can't be angry if you share something and someone you don't really know so well comes to you and asks you about that – so you have to limit yourself in a way.” (Brandon)

“I know that there's stalkers and people out there who can look for you with that information so I just like keep it all minor stuff like my hobbies and my interests and stuff like that” (Melissa)

“Well, a couple of years back there was an incident about teenagers hooking up with fake people that they thought were adolescents and then they gave their address out and everything and then the person comes and visits them and they're either raped or murdered...it's a big thing for adolescents. But it's your choices you make on Facebook, that's the thing. If you're gonna give everything out you gonna put yourself in danger...so you will never be safe then. “ (Zaheer)

Nosko et al. (2009) conducted research that specifically explored the nature of information revealed on Facebook. Their results are supported by the aforementioned statements by participants – participants are wary of the types of information chosen for online disclosure. Consequently disclosure is usually not of a personal nature. The research conducted by Nosko et al (2009) similarly indicated that online social networking users displayed a form of reservation when developing their online profiles, or made active decisions in limiting the information they decided to disclose online. Mesch et al. (2010) indicate that this may be directly associated with the transformations around the concept of privacy. Information on online social networks such as Facebook, is shared on a large scale and as a result leads to an increased ability to gather enormous amounts of information online. This information can be used for the benefit of its readers, but may also be used by individuals displaying pathological behaviour who pose a threat to society. As the participants described, this may be in the form of stalkers and paedophiles. Nosko et al. (2009) refers to this as

the dangers of 'social threat' – where resultant harm to the individual or group is possible depending on the details that are shared online.

The behaviour, described by the participants as well as the research above can be succinctly explained by the theory associated with operant conditioning. Skinner was the theorist who suggested that an individual's behaviour can be modified by the consequences associated with the behaviour (Berk; 2006). In other words, in terms of adolescents and their Facebook use, as a result of being aware of the consequences of sharing information that might be too personal for public sharing (such as cyber- bullying and stalking), the probability of sharing such information is decreased. Conversely, when a positive response is received for specific behaviour, the behaviour may be increased (and will be explored in the section looking at Facebook and the promotion of positive self-esteem). However, in this case, data reflects that for many participants, the consequential dangers associated with over-sharing personal information online decrease their willingness to do so.

The following section will explore cyber-bullying and its impact on the participants' degree of self-disclosure online.

4.5.2) Cyber-bullying

According to Spears, Slee, Owens and Johnson (2009), there has recently been a dramatic increase in reports of cyber-bullying. They clarify that this form of bullying refers specifically to the use of communication media used to intimidate, control, put down, manipulate and humiliate others. Hinjuda and Patchin (2008) as well as Belsey (2005) *cited in* Spears et al. (2009) indicate that this form of bullying often has a greater impact than conventional 'school yard' bullying as it is unbound by either time and place.

Data gained reflects the problems surrounding cyber-bullying are related to the fact that one's privacy is no longer personally controlled. Respondents indicated that other individuals, who might not necessarily even be their online 'friends',

may decide to upload their personal information onto Facebook, which is subsequently shared with the online world. Therefore, users are no longer solely responsible for information that is shared online and as a result, their privacy may be threatened. The participants' statements clearly echo this concept:

*"With like photos and that kind of stuff, like, I mean even if it's not you – somebody else could upload a photo that's damaging to your own image. And that would definitely damage your life. I mean, like an example is, like if I'm a prefect and somebody else gets a picture of me and it looks like I'm drinking or something, I mean that could definitely damage my reputation and image."
(Simon)*

*"You can call people names...ugly names and when they make statuses people actually tag you into their status. Umm...(people put up) ugly pictures (of you) and then the caption they'll put there is like "Lame" and yah...everyone gets to see that stuff"
(Marlene)*

"Like putting groups on Facebook about you like "aaaahhh this person is such a blah blah blah" and lots of people join that group and you see it obviously on your news feed and stuff – that could bring your self-esteem down if someone continues and makes a horrible status about you and everyone likes it or comments on it then that's obviously bad. And I know there was something that just happened recently – there's a video about Nutella and 2 Grade 9 girls and people are making statuses about them. And I know there is this girl in my class who made a status about it and she got like over 100 likes on it. So I'm sure those girls are feeling pretty...yah...now that video is going around and being posted on Facebook and stuff." (Mark)

Spears et al. (2009) reinforces these findings and reveals that the misuse of photographic and such media is perceived as having a greater negative impact than would the receipt of negative e-mails or chat room conversations. The data reflects that this is most probably due to the public nature of online disclosure (as indicated in the responses), whereas e-mails and conversations remain hidden from the public's eyes. "What used to occur in the privacy of one's own social network is now open to abuse by others, many of whom are complete strangers" (Spears et al.; 194;2009).

The impact this kind of interaction may have on an adolescent's self-esteem development is of grave concern, specifically when one considers how impressionable they are given their stage of life. Previously, in the theoretical framework, the idea of adolescent development was explored, it was mentioned how Wolf (1988) theorized that the cognitive development associated with the adolescent stage of life assists adolescents in recognizing 'parental defects'. This awareness allows the adolescent to divide themselves from their parents and to become more involved with a social peer group. Erikson (1968 *cited in* Cole et al.; 2001) described how this resolution of what he terms a 'developmental crisis' leads to the development of their own personal identity. Due to the prevalence of melancholic experiences and feelings during this stage of development, it is unsurprising that public humiliation experienced through the online sphere during this time, may result in long term psychological difficulties (Erikson 1968 *cited in* Cole et al.; 2001 and Berk; 2006) and therefore needs to be thoroughly assessed and acutely dealt with.

In the following section, the theme of Facebook and its effects on a positive self-esteem will be investigated and discussed in detail.

4.6) Theme 3: Facebook and the promotion of positive self-esteem

Data pertaining to the relevant research question regarding Facebook and the promotion of positive self-esteem indicated that ten of the fifteen participants interviewed, indicated that the majority of their interactions through the social

networking site, Facebook, made them feel good about themselves and as a result, promoted the development of a positive self-esteem. Previous studies have indicated that human beings are born with the need for (positive?) self-esteem (Schlenker cited in Krämer et al. 2008), consequently, its development is fundamental to one's psychological progression and it therefore needs to be maintained and nurtured. According to participants, Facebook provides a platform for this maintenance.

Data indicated that three primary incentives underpinned Facebook's promotion of positive self-esteem. These themes will be divided into categories, namely: attention and acknowledgement; interaction; and support. These categories will now be explored in greater detail.

4.6.1) Attention and acknowledgement:

A resounding majority of participants (fourteen of the fifteen interviewed) indicated that Facebook assists in boosting one's self-esteem through affirmation. This was indicated primarily as being a consequence of attention and acknowledgement received from Facebook friends. Respondents indicated that attention and acknowledgement is usually received in the following ways: positive comments relating to statuses and photographs; comments on achievements; Facebook friends posting messages onto a user's public Facebook wall; the receipt of friend requests; and having Facebook friends post appealing and positive pictures of the user online. Respondents revealed that a boost in self-esteem usually followed these types of interactions, as implied in the comments below:

"When I have nice pictures and then like people comment and they comment with good comments and say "that's a beautiful picture...how did you take it? Where did you take it?" and then it makes you feel good because then I know I'm pretty" (Lily)

"If I get in touch with a really old friend I haven't spoken to in a while then that's also really nice...so ya...I guess that kind of stuff does build up your self-esteem...and like also, what we were going on about earlier – if you meet someone and they add you (as a friend) that means that they actually do kinda care" (Bulumko)

"Yes it does (promote positive self-esteem), I mean like I mean obviously with wall posts it's nice to see that somebody is thinking about you and writing on your wall and if people like your status then it like ummm....if you get like a lot of....like the other day I had 30...no, more 'likes' and thought like "Wow! Obviously people care what I'm talking about." so obviously it does (make you feel good about yourself) and so you try find things that are, in a way, the same as what you just did so that you can kinda...you know...continue the streak" (Brandon)

These statements all reflect the importance participants place on positive feedback from their friends through Facebook, however, the researcher considers Brandon's comment to be the most thought provoking. Brandon's comment clearly indicates how vital it is for him to *"continue the streak"*. His statement implies that the positive response he received from a specific status-update, reinforces his drive to continue posting statuses, in order to continue receiving similar positive attention and acknowledgement from his friends. This reflects the operant conditioning theory described earlier by Skinner (Berk; 2006) where an individual's behaviour is modified as a result of the consequences immediately following its expression. As previously stated, when positive feedback is experienced, it will often increase the motivation to continue the behaviour, as described by Brandon. Pempek et al. (2009) which indicates that peer feedback influences the user's self-esteem, as is evident in Brandon's response. Additionally in this statement, he is making clear reference to how he manages his self-presentation in order to promote a positive self-

esteem. This idea, of self-presentation, will be explored in greater detail in Theme 5 entitled online presentation versus reality.

When participants were questioned regarding the effect of Facebook on the development of a positive self-esteem amongst their peers, similar responses were described. These are reflected in the following statements:

"A lot of people, well, this isn't a very good thing but a lot of people they accept a lot of people as their friends and then they think about all their friends, and it makes them feel better about themselves and if people comment and 'like' your status that can also make you feel better" (Melissa)

"I'm sure some people get a kick out of it, like if they make an update and they get lots of comments and likes – I'm sure that gets them...like people think "Wow, people are actually checking up on me and I'm really happy about that."...I dunno if it sounds shallow, but the interaction that you get...coz I mean, when you make an update to tell people about something that you're doing...the interaction, and that someone else is also involved or interested in whatever your update is about...like I said, a lot of people get a kick out of lots of other people getting what they're going on about. I think people who crave attention get a lot of it from Facebook, coz like I said, they put their updates and then people start talking to them about their updates and then they talk back...and I think it's really an attention thing. Like any person that updates or has an update about their relationship or something...I think that's pure attention seeking because they know other people will be attracted, or they know other people will go to that (update) and they'll start talking with their friends about this and their relationship and I think that's like...anything remotely...I wanna say controversial, or even like that, will get you a lot of attention in real life even...like lots of friends see that

you're in a relationship with this person on (via) Facebook, then in real life, people will come to you and all of their friends will be talking about you as well and I think people get a lot of joy out of seeing how much other people care about their lives ". (Simon)

The impression generated by the responses above is supported by Ahn (2011) who indicates that adolescents, who frequently use social network sites such as Facebook, usually have more friends connected to their site(page?) and consequently, receive more reactions to information they choose to share. She continues to explain that the more positive the responses from peers, the more positive the impact on the user's self-esteem. Cole et al. (2001) suggests this is because peer acceptance during the adolescent years is critical to the development of positive self-esteem. They suggest this is due to the acceptance provided by the peer group as the individual begins moving away from the parental unit in order to find their place in society as well as their own identity (Berk; 2006).

Krämer et al. (2008) and Ellison et al. (2011) both conducted research focusing on the user's need to promote a positive self-esteem, and both researchers are of the opinion that people with a lower self-esteem will be more eager to engage in self-esteem promoting activities, such as the example described by the participant, Melissa, presenting large numbers of online friends, or as Simon described, putting a large amount of effort into what is shared on one's profile in order to promote more 'banter' (and in turn acknowledgement and attention) between friends resulting in a potential increase in self-esteem.

Based on the participants' accounts, it seems that positive feedback, such as positive comments on pictures, wall-posts and friend-requests all promote a positive self-esteem amongst adolescents. Similarly, those who share more online information (whether it be as a result of negative self-esteem or not), receive more attention, often resulting in increased acknowledgement, in turn resulting in an increase in self-esteem. These findings are in keeping with prior aforementioned research done (Krämer et al. (2008), Ahn (2011), Pempek et al.

(2009) and Ellison et al. (2011)) thus providing added weight to the researcher's findings.

Finally, Ahn (2011), Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) all make an interesting differentiation, which the researcher feels warrants a mention. They explain that it is not the site alone (in this case, Facebook) that causes an increase in self-esteem. It is the positive or negative reactions adolescents experience online that may be beneficial or detrimental to their development.

The attention and acknowledgement participants described in this section would not be possible without the interaction that takes place online, this will be explored in the following category.

4.6.2) Interaction:

Ten of the fifteen participants interviewed indicated that interaction was an important factor for the promotion of a positive self-esteem. Intimacy and interaction is vital for identity development as well as the development of positive self-esteem in adolescents (Mikami et al. 2010 and Subrahmanyam et al. 2008). The topic of intimacy was previously examined in the theme dealing with disclosure determinants (Theme 2) –where it was explained that through the sharing of personal information, connections between individuals are made. Intimacy would be impossible without interaction. According to the adolescent participants, interaction also comes with its own benefits.

Discussions with the participants suggested that interaction augments feelings of connectedness and belonging, and therefore helps to promote a positive self-esteem. This is echoed in the following statements:

“People feel like they have more friends because people speak to them on Facebook even though they may not talk to them in real life – that could make them feel good. Like “Oh, look! I have 20

people online and 10 of them are talking to me out of their own free will” (Abigail)

“I just like being on there (Facebook) so that I’m in with the in-group – it makes me feel connected with my friends and that and Facebook is there to help me with my problems. Like say I’m having a bad day and my friends send me messages on Facebook chat (to help make me feel better)” (Saadiq)

The idea behind these comments has been replicated in research conducted by Mikami et al. (2010) where, after interviewing adolescents from a Middle School in Virginia, USA, results indicated that adolescents reported increased feelings of positivity, depending on the size of their Facebook friends list. Similarly, in a research article written by Valkenburg and Peter (2009) the discussion of the social compensation hypothesis leads to the assumption that socially anxious adolescents specifically choose to communicate online because it is less inhibiting than face-to-face social interactions. They explain that the online environment is perceived to be a protected environment due to the limited social cues that exist (for example, there are no auditory or visual cues). Consequently, adolescents with lower self-esteem and increased social anxiety are better able to interact with friends online, as reflected in Abigail’s statement, which would assist in promoting self-esteem development.

Saadiq’s statement regarding Facebook use as an instrument to assist in feeling connected and supported holds true for many adolescents. This notion is reinforced by the theory which states that online communication and disclosure reinforces social connectedness and thereby well-being (Valkenberg et al.; 2009). Additionally, research suggests that peer relationships established during adolescence become critical in early adulthood as peers often become the primary source of support (Mikami et al.; 2010). Arnette (2000), *cited in Pempek (2009)*, as reflected on previously in the theoretical framework, suggests that the social network, Facebook, provides the platform to receive the social and emotional support necessary during this time. Additionally, Joinson (2008)

indicates that the social network also provides the necessary information resources in order to deal with individual's difficulties. Therefore, interaction and the resulting positive self-esteem developments that go hand-in-hand with it, through the Facebook website, is vital for an adolescent's psychological development and well-being and serves as solid ground for their development into adulthood.

It is therefore evident that the data supports the findings in the above stated literature (Mikami et al.; 2010, Pempek et al.; (2009); Joinson (2008) and Valkenberg et al.; 2009): that interaction through Facebook assists with the promotion of positive self-esteem.

In the following section, we will explore Facebook and its promotion of negative self-esteem.

4.7) Theme 4: Facebook and the promotion of negative self-esteem

Eight of the fifteen students interviewed indicated that at times, Facebook made them feel bad about themselves. Interestingly, when participants were asked if they felt Facebook could be harmful to other adolescents and their self-esteem, all the participants (fifteen of the fifteen interviewed) indicated they felt that Facebook has a negative effect on other adolescents. This discrepancy in results may indicate that adolescents were apprehensive about admitting the personal effects experienced regarding negative self-esteem as a result of interactions on Facebook.

With such a high proportion of participants indicating that they felt strongly about Facebook and the promotion of negative self-esteem, this theme was created. Categories related to this theme will be discussed in this section. These include the following: negative feedback and cyber-bullying, decreased privacy and gossip, as well as comparing self to others.

4.7.1) Negative feedback and cyber-bullying:

Ten of the fifteen participants indicated that negative feedback and or negative responses to their Facebook posts or comments, as well as photographs posted onto their wall that were negative in nature, affected their self-esteem. Palfrey (2008) *cited in* Spears et al. (2009) terms cyber-bullying as acts that may involve direct (such as chat or text messaging), semi-public (such as posting a harassing message on an e-mail list), or public communications (such as creating a website devoted to making fun of the victim). The following statements represent participants' views regarding these two occurrences:

"If someone sends you a friend request and if you reject it, then they'll feel like, then they'll obviously feel very bad." (Eric)

"When I put pictures on (Facebook) sometimes they comment on my weight and that stuff and then that brings me quite down." (Zaheer)

"There was this one photo on Facebook of this girl wearing small shorts, like short shorts. It wasn't like anything hectic or anything but then there was this whole argument on the comments like "How can you wear that? It's so short. You slut." – and this was from a chick that doesn't even know her. And then there was this whole argument and all. I'm sure she felt crap about that because EVERYONE saw that...like if some young girl, like you know, when you still feel insecure and whatever, if someone in an insecure or depressed state or like very affected by what other people think of them. Coz that is basically what Facebook is, I dunno, like people – all the commenting on photos is like people trying to say what they think of you or whatever, so I could see how that can upset." (Abigail)

Belsey cited in Spears et al. (2009) indicates that the impact of negative remarks and cyber-bullying may be greater than traditional bullying as it can occur anytime and anywhere. Currently, the researcher believes, based on the sample, it can be assumed that the majority of adolescents today own internet enabled cell-phones which they have access to all day, every day. Ease of access and motivation to use the Facebook website is high amongst adolescent participants, as explored earlier in the study, therefore, the researcher believes it is plausible that the impact of negative feedback and cyber-bullying through Facebook is highly damaging.

Additionally, Spears et al. (2009) indicates that because the world of cyberspace exists alongside family and schooling contexts, it is more difficult for adolescents to face the challenges posed by these forms of communication in the 'real world' context.

Keeping the above ideas in mind, it is unsurprising that research conducted by Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) indicated that feedback from the Facebook site influences self-esteem, with positive input increasing it and negative feedback decreasing it. However, it is interesting that as a result of their research they noted: "It is impossible to tell whether negative feedback *per se* reduced self-esteem or whether participants with lower self-esteem typically perceived the feedback they received as more negative, which in turn caused a further dip in their self-esteem"(Subrahmanyam et al.; 2008; 126).

This idea is further supported by the ideas surrounding object relations (Winnicott; 2002; Wolf; 1988 and Klein; 1987). This theory suggests that if an infant received optimal care during their formative years, it is believed they will develop healthy outlooks on the world. Conversely, an individual who receives less optimal care, will most likely suffer from psychological difficulties later in life. Keeping this theory in mind, the researcher therefore suggests the manner in which adolescents receive negative feedback through the social networking site, Facebook, will be directly linked to experiences associated with their early development and object relations.

Although the majority of the research concurs with the current research finding that negative feedback and cyber-bullying may result in a decreased self-esteem (Spears et al.; 2009), the researcher considers Subrahmanyam et al.'s (2008) comment and the theories associated with object relations to hold much value. The negative impact of such remarks depends highly on an individual's perception of a comment or interaction, which is often related to their intrinsic self-esteem levels as well as the developments and delays in the achievement of object constancy. Therefore, although the research concurs with current theories, the researcher feels that additional research considering this specific aspect needs to be conducted in order to fully appreciate the impact of negative feedback and cyber-bullying.

Linked to the issue of negative feedback and cyber-bullying is the topic of decreased privacy and gossip. This is an additional area of concern described by the participants and will be explored in the following section.

4.7.2) Decreased privacy and gossip:

Nine of the fifteen participants indicated that they considered decreased privacy to have a negative impact on adolescents and their self-esteem. They indicated that it is common for users to post comments or share pictures of people, without having requested permission from the person who is in the picture. At times, this prevents adolescent Facebook users from having any control over what people post or say about them.

Additionally, seven of the participants indicated that gossip and negative information spreads swiftly online, adding to the profound negative effect the shared information has on the self-esteem of the person being discussed. The researcher has combined these two experiences into one category, as the reactions from participants indicated that they felt it was decreased privacy which in fact resulted in the increased gossip, ultimately connecting the two experiences.

During the interviews, several participants described experiencing negativity that was specifically related to the decreased privacy and gossip the Facebook website facilitates. Others explained that although they might not have experienced such incidents directly, they believed the result of such interaction was often negative for the affected adolescent.

"Everyone feeds off...when someone puts something negative online and you can see it, and then there's a frenzy about whatever they're talking about with all your friends online...like at the moment there is something going around where these 2 girls did something really terrible. And so now, ummm...people are putting stuff out there and people are liking it...so you can imagine how the two girls who did, at the time they didn't realize what they were doing, but these 2 girls obviously, they must be feeling terrible because so many people, their friends and friends of friends all comment. People aren't really name droppers but people will talk about it." (Brandon)

"Gossip and tagging...like how can I say...maybe tagging like pictures...can I say...maybe bad pictures..." (Sihle)

"Posting pictures that are not supposed to be seen and other private things. The problem with Facebook is that people you are not friends with, they have access to your wall –which I think is actually not a good thing coz if you not friends with someone they should just be blocked. I think it's very dangerous." (Lily)

Additionally participants also indicated that at times, they have been burdened with being the subjects of privacy invasions, such as having their Facebook accounts hacked (as previously stated in Theme 2), subsequently resulting in the sharing of vicious rumours and hurtful information.

Valkenburg et al (2006) indicates that often, reactions to profiles are public to other members of a social networking website. They believe that this phenomenon has an impact on the affected adolescents' self-esteem, as negative reactions to photographs or statuses are prone to have a destructive effect on self-esteem. Moreover, Subrahmanyam et al.(2008) indicate that one of the many challenges as a result of electronic communication and privacy, is that words can be copied and shared with others who might not originally have been intended to be part of the audience receiving the information. As a result, private information is at times shared with the broader community, resulting in the shared information becoming uncontrollable and putting the subject's privacy at risk. This notion was acknowledged in Brandon's explanation, where he described the "frenzy" that results in negative news and gossip being spread.

The opinions stated above, by Valkenburg et al. (2006) and Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) both indicate that current research concurs with the results obtained from this research. Decreased privacy and gossip unquestionably have an adverse effect on self-esteem, resulting in a more negative self-esteem and as a result, potentially a poorer self-image.

Even though research has found this to be the case, "The habitual use of Facebook and its integration into daily life indicates that it has become an indispensable tool of social capital and connectedness with large numbers of people. The benefits of Facebook outweigh privacy concerns, even when concrete privacy invasion was experienced" (Debatin et al; 2009; 100). The researcher considers this reality to pose a serious threat for the development of an adolescent's positive self-esteem. Although the benefits of interaction on Facebook have been proven to be numerous, the reality for many adolescents is that the negative impact, as a result of decreased privacy and gossip can be highly unfavourable.

4.8) Theme 5: Online presentation Vs. Reality

Facebook provides a space for users to post information about themselves on a profile (Tong et al.; 2008). Each profile contains a space for the profile owner to display a photograph of themselves, a space to write a description of themselves as well as a Facebook wall where other Facebook users and 'friends' are able to share messages, photographs and links in a public manner with the owner of the profile. Additionally, information, generated by the computer system itself, indicates the number of friends a user possesses connected to their Facebook page (Tong et al.; 2008). This is also displayed on the profile in varying proportions. The above information is available to other Facebook users depending on the principal user's chosen privacy settings.

The description above relates to how adolescents present themselves online through Facebook. The researcher is interested in how these online representations compare to who the profile holders are in reality. Krämer et al. (2008) refers to this occurrence as impression management (Krämer et al.; 2008).

In the analysis of the data concerning this theme, online presentations versus reality, three main categories arose, namely: ideal-self presentation; popularity; and the avoidance of sharing negative or unflattering information. In the following sections, these categories will be explored in greater detail.

4.8.1) Ideal-self presentation:

Eleven of the fifteen participants indicated that they felt that various Facebook friends' online profiles presented a different person from who they were in reality. When the same question was posed regarding their own self-representation online, twelve of the fifteen participants indicated that they felt their online representations were realistic and truthful in the information they displayed.

Respondents, by altering the way in which they characterize themselves on their profile, believe it is possible to modify the way online peers perceive and relate to them. Responses from discussions with participants indicated that this is usually achieved by the changing of profile pictures, statuses, relationship statuses and information that is manually uploaded to a profile.

The following statements indicate participants' thoughts regarding idealised presentation of self online:

"Not all...but a few of them (Facebook friends), they make out to be like very different to what they are. I think they just do it to put out a self image that they are really like that – but they aren't really like that...because like a lot of teenagers are insecure about what and who they really are and they feel they aren't good enough. So they try make themselves good enough through Facebook and try and make a personality, like a new personality on Facebook of what they would like to be. And I think they do that because it makes them feel like they belong and that they have friends."
(Melissa)

"Some people try to improve their lives over Facebook by making themselves seem more fun or more...they've made themselves into an image where you can't really hate that person because they do everything cool...but I mean most people see through that but they still try to change who they are on Facebook to make themselves seem cooler or better than they are." (Simon)

"Well, the idea of Facebook – specially with photo's is to show who you are...but I'm sure there are some people who are probably quite insecure who like maybe photoshop photos of themselves – ya, coz they're unhappy with themselves and that's just another way for them to be who they WANT to be, rather than who they are." (Alex)

The responses above suggest that participants and their adolescent peers are creating ideal selves, in order to boost failing self images and poor self-esteem as a result of wanting to be accepted rather than rejected. However, in research conducted by Krämer et al. (2008) they suggest the opposite, and propose that individuals often present themselves elaborately because they have the self-esteem to do so. Their idea is based on research conducted by Bandura (1997) *cited in* Krämer et al. (2008), which theorizes that if an individual possesses optimistic belief in him/herself, he/she often feels more competent and effective in completing a task. This in turn has a strong effect on behaviour, as it implies that when one believes in one's ability to achieve something, one would be more willing to take the necessary risks in order to achieve the chosen goal. In the case of social networking, this would involve presenting oneself more elaborately.

Bandura is also of the perspective that people learn through the social contexts around them. This is referred to as Social Learning Theory (Berk; 2006). Processes such as observational learning, imitation, and the feedback that results from these assist individuals in learning about what is acceptable or not. In the current research, data implies that when an adolescent shares a realistic presentation of themselves, it is received in a positive light ensuring that the realistic presentation is maintained and eventually becomes the norm. Conversely, when an online presentation is perceived as idealistic, feedback from peers might be negative and therefore, the presentation is adapted.

The researcher feels that data collected from the participants contradict the findings of Bandura (1997) and Krämer et al. (2008). Although there is definitely an element of social learning in terms of how adolescents choose to represent themselves online, the researcher proposes that for many participants and adolescents, manipulation of the manner in which they present themselves online is more about creating elevated self-esteem as a consequence of poor or low self-esteem and insecurity, rather than, as suggested by Krämer et al. (2008), a motivation to create elaborate self-presentations as a result of a strong self-esteem. Respondents clearly indicate that they feel that adolescents change the

way in which they present themselves online with the intention of trying to improve their lives, by creating a new self-image which peers can relate to and accept. This as a result, allows the adolescent to feel accepted by their peers. The researcher feels that the participants' descriptions reinforce her stance: that for many adolescents, Facebook and one's self-presentation on it, is used to elevate poor self-esteem rather than develop an already positive self-image.

The researcher's proposition is reinforced by Valkenburg et al.'s (2006) theory which states that human beings have a universal desire to protect and enhance their self-esteem. Correspondingly, Pempek et al. (2009) indicate that in research conducted, it was found that youth post content online that will assist in self-validation. It is therefore plausible that participants and adolescents will consistently attempt to present themselves in the most ideal way in order to elicit positive feedback from peers and as a result experience an increase in self-esteem.

4.8.2) Popularity:

Much angst during adolescence stems from wanting to be socially accepted, therefore, it is unsurprising that nine of the fifteen participants indicated that popularity was an important consideration when deciding how they or their friends would present themselves online.

It seems, according to participants' responses, that popularity is not only a matter of quantity but of quality as well: It is related to fitting in and being accepted by peers in addition to being seen in a positive light.

When asked why adolescents might feel the need to change the way they present themselves online, participants provided the following answers:

"It could be about popularity...umm...maybe if they don't fit in with a particular group at school, then they could try fit in with a group on Facebook." (Brandon)

"It's always like a competition. To see who's the best – who has the nicest hair, nicest eyes, nicest body..." (Marlene)

"For people who aren't that popular...maybe they wanna seem popular to others and show a good impression on others" (Zareena)

These findings concur with research conducted by Tom Tong et al. (2008). They suggest that popularity on Facebook is divided into two constructs, namely peer-perceived popularity as well as sociometric popularity. Peer-perceived popularity, as the participants described, refers to individuals who are experienced as more socially dominant in terms of social interactions (for example, individuals who regularly update statuses or post sociable pictures of themselves).

Sociometric popularity, on the other hand, is related to how many online friends an individual has and is based on how physically attractive a profile holder is (Tom Tong et al.; 2008). This implies that people who are more popular on Facebook are also perceived as being physically attractive. This theory concurs with Marlene's comment, where she shares her opinion that interactions on Facebook often feel like a 'competition' to be the prettiest.

The researcher believes that although achieving popularity on Facebook has self-esteem benefits for the participants as well as for their adolescent peers, the pressure experienced to be well liked and accepted might have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Constantly trying to compete with how two to three hundred other Facebook friends are presenting themselves can become anxiety inducing and might, in actual fact, result in a diminished self-esteem rather than an elevated one.

4.8.3) Avoidance of sharing negative or unflattering information:

Seven of the fifteen participants indicated that it is vital for them to they keep the information they choose to share, as well as the information on their Facebook profiles, positive. Respondents specifically described deciding not to share personal familial situations such as death and divorce. The sharing of unflattering photographs, information regarding illegal behaviours such as underage drinking and smoking, as well as any failures (whether it be academic or on the sports field) also seems to be prohibited for many participants.

The following responses reflect participants' opinions regarding the public sharing of negative and unflattering information on Facebook:

"They're choosing to put up stuff that won't make them look bad"
(Zaheer)

"Ya like obviously I don't want a person to see me as weird...kind of...like an outcast or something like that...you want the pictures to be half decent of yourself...like looking good and happy"
(Simon)

"I would have the kind of person I am and like the fun stuff about me...like what I like and what my friends like about me. Umm...I would have that kind of good stuff. I wouldn't post the negative stuff about me online" (Mark)

Valkenberg et al. (2006) explain that adolescents are often preoccupied with how they appear to their peers. Taking this theory into consideration, it is to be expected that participants and their peers would not wish to display negative information online, as they believe it might be interpreted in a negative light and reflect badly upon them. Respondents claim that the avoidance of sharing negative information does not reflect a completely different online persona, but

rather reflects truthful parts of the whole and chosen aspects of themselves they would prefer to promote.

The responses above suggest that individuals who communicate through online social networking sites, such as Facebook, are aware that what they choose to communicate and how they choose to share that information will affect how others perceive them. This finding was replicated by Krämer et al. (2008), thus adding weight to the researcher's findings.

The researcher believes that this awareness allows the participants to choose the severity of the impact that the sharing of private information may have on their self-esteem. If they share negative information, they understand that they might receive negative feedback, possibly resulting in decreased self-esteem levels. However, if they select only positive information to share, they know they are less likely to incur negative feedback from peers and potentially the resulting detrimental effects on self-esteem thereof.

4.9) Conclusion:

The results of the data collected indicate that adolescent motivation to use the social networking site Facebook is high. This is due to the fact that it allows them to communicate and interact with others, keep informed with friends and their activities as well as share important information. The support, attention and acknowledgement received via online interactions have also been attested to throughout the results discussion. Additionally, the realm of reality compared to the experience of an online reality indicated that Facebook users are given the opportunity to create their own online identities that can be experimented with. All of the activities referred to during the results discussion have been identified as being vital in the development of an adolescent's enhanced self-esteem.

The negative aspects of Facebook use have also been explored throughout the data analysis and results discussion. Difficulties related to cyber-bullying and

negative feedback, as well as the reality that privacy and safety are often at greater risk through online interactions through Facebook rather than with face-to-face interactions. Even though this is the case, data received reflected that although participants were aware of these difficulties, and in many cases had experienced them personally, the positive rewards of using the Facebook website far outweighed the negative impacts of using it ensuring the adolescents continued use.

Throughout this chapter, all the data discussions have indicated both positive as well as negative effects of Facebook use on adolescent self-esteem and have been supported by literature on the subject.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1) Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will present the main findings of the study. Information gathered and analysed from interviews with participants will provide the basis for the conclusions. This will be followed by recommendations from the researcher that have arisen as a result of the study's findings.

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Comment [9]: "s" or "z"?

5.2) Main conclusions

At the beginning of this study, the following research question was posed: "Does online social networking through Facebook have an effect on adolescent self-esteem?". The general answer based on the study results indicates that Facebook does affect adolescent self-esteem, in both positive and negative ways. These findings, along with other findings in relation to the specified research objectives, will now be discussed in further detail.

5.2.1) Objective 1

To determine what motivates adolescents to use the social networking site. Facebook, as their chosen form of social networking.

Research results reflect that the positive effect Facebook has on the adolescent participants' self-esteem is actually a motivational force for their continued Facebook use. Results indicate that a high proportion of participants' friends and family use the social networking site, Facebook, as their social network of choice. Consequently, most of the interaction and communication which takes place through Facebook promotes feelings of social inclusion and intimacy.

If one considers that the majority of the feedback participants receive through Facebook, is from both friends and family and is most often positive in nature, it

is unsurprising that these interactions increase the adolescents' feelings of positivity. This in turn promotes a positive self-esteem which reinforces the participants' continued use of the website.

Another motivating factor for the preferential usage of Facebook, was found to be the ease of access that Facebook provides to a large population of their friends, family and acquaintances. Facebook is not only accessible through a computer, but is now available through all Internet-enabled cell-phones. This makes communication through the website easy and instant, allowing adolescents to keep abreast of friends' activities, and in essence, assists them in remaining socially-connected. The feeling of social-connection, satisfaction and acceptance that Facebook affords its users are therefore also motivating factors for Facebook usage, amongst adolescents in particular.

5.2.2) Objective 2

To ascertain what determines adolescents' level of disclosure of personal information on the social networking site, Facebook.

The avoidance of sharing negative and unflattering information such as personal difficulties, unflattering photographs and illegal behaviours such as underage drinking, smoking and drug use was indicated as being a consideration when deciding what information should be shared on a Facebook profile. The research results indicated that the avoidance of sharing such information is not perceived by the participants as being related to impression management. Rather, they describe it as having the ability to choose which aspects of themselves they would prefer to promote online, directly having an impact on how their peers perceive them. The promotion of positive aspects of themselves assists them in creating and maintaining a positive self-image, thus assisting in the promotion of a positive self-esteem.

Additionally, participants indicated that often concerns regarding personal safety, privacy, as well as the use of shared information, all have an impact on

how much they decide to disclose in the online sphere. Cyber-bullying, in particular, seems to be a force which has greatly influenced the degree and type of disclosure in this group of participants.

To adolescents in particular, being accepted and liked by peers is of vital importance. As a result, the aforementioned negative elements would have more damaging effects for adolescent users than for adults. Therefore, it is not surprising that research results indicated that information shared on the Facebook network by participants is at times selective, as users are aware of and concerned with issues regarding their privacy and the aforementioned complications of online disclosure.

5.2.3) Objective 3

To identify how the social networking site Facebook contributes to a positive self-esteem.

The question posed around Facebook and its promotion of positive self-esteem yielded interesting results as responses from participants clearly indicated how important social connectedness, interaction and support are to them at their current stage of development.

Results indicated that the receipt of attention and acknowledgement through interactions such as positive comments received on status updates and photographs, comments by friends on personal achievements, the receipt of friend requests and wall posts, as well as support received from friends via the Facebook website assisted in promoting feelings of connectedness and intimacy, thereby helping to achieve a more positive attitude and self-image. If one considers how vital social-connectedness is for adolescents in order to form a positive self-image and self-esteem, it is understandable how the positive feelings associated with Facebook-use promote its continued use and the positivity the majority of adolescents feel towards it.

The researcher found it noteworthy that some adolescents admitted to presenting themselves online in ways they thought would generate more positive feedback. The motivation behind such a conscious decision to attract positive feedback, as supported by the research findings and supporting literature, revolves around adolescent self-esteem development.

In essence, it seems to the researcher, that participants are aware that certain types of information shared online, are more likely to attract positive attention and acknowledgement. Therefore, by controlling the information they share online, adolescents are able to exert some influence on their likelihood of receiving positive responses. Consequently, it can be argued that online sites such as Facebook, afford its users a certain degree of influence on their own self-esteem development through its role as a portal for feedback, and communication from the outside world.

5.2.4) Objective 4

To identify how the social networking site Facebook contributes to a negative self-esteem.

Research results were not all one-sided and positive in nature. The researcher's findings indicated that Facebook may also have negative effects on the development of the adolescent participants' self-esteem. The various contributing factors will now be presented. Results indicate that the primary source of negative feelings experienced as a result of interaction through Facebook resulted from negative experiences, such as negative feedback to wall posts and photographs. Considering the sheer size of the Facebook community, these effects might be profound if a large number of Facebook users give negative feedback to the user. Such negative effects might be further exaggerated by the public nature of Facebook, which allows negative publicity to have a 'snowball effect', thereby compounding the potential negative effects on the adolescents' self-esteem.

In particular, participants expressed concern regarding cyber-bullying and stalking, universal phenomena which both add significant weight to the potential negative effects of Facebook on users' self-esteem.

Research results also showed that privacy invasions and cyber-bullying can include Facebook accounts being hacked into, where vicious rumours and hurtful information are shared and then spread. It was also revealed that the more hurtful and negative the information being shared, the faster it is shared with other users. Therefore, it can be said that decreased privacy can, at times, lead to increased gossip, and as a result, the promotion of negative-self esteem through the Facebook website.

5.2.5) Objective 5

To determine the differences between adolescents' online representation of themselves compared to reality.

Impression management is known to play a critical role when choosing to communicate online (Kramer et al.; 2003). Results indicated that the majority of participants felt that the bulk of their friends' profiles are more related to their ideal-self perceptions rather than being realistically based. It was indicated that participants believed this was a common occurrence because through choosing how they wish to present themselves, users are able to manipulate the way their online friends relate and perceive them. In this way, participants felt adolescents were able to promote a more positive self-image and thereby self-esteem, as they would most likely receive more positive responses from friends as a result of a more positive self-presentation. Interestingly enough, the majority of the participants' responses indicated that they felt their own profiles and Facebook presentations were based on more realistic realities rather than their ideals.

The idea that participants perceive their own interactions on Facebook differently to how they perceive fellow adolescents interactions has been a recurring trend throughout the study. The researcher feels this occurrence

needs to be explored in future studies as it may be a whole new avenue of research (i.e.: the use of defense mechanisms through online interaction), however, she is also aware that it may also be a weakness related to the researcher's chosen form of data capturing, as face-to-face interviews with certain participants, which may have impacted on how honest they may have been in disclosing their thoughts and feelings.

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Comment [10]: Their honesty

5.3) Main recommendations

This study explored the effects of interactions through Facebook on adolescent self-esteem. It brought to the fore a number of issues which need to be considered. These will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.1) For future research

Whilst researching literature to be referenced and used throughout this study, it became apparent that a deficiency of research exists in terms of Facebook and adolescence. The majority of previous research conducted related specifically to the older age groups such as college and university students as well as young adults, as opposed to adolescents.

This leaves a serious gap in the research market, so to speak, as adolescents are fast becoming the main users of such technologies and are the most at risk when it comes to the impact of online communication, due to their highly impressionable developmental stage in life. Additionally, the manner in which they engage with online social media is changing rapidly.

For this reason, as a result of the knowledge gained in this research, three main areas arose which the researcher suggests should be explored further, in a South African context:

- An examination of how an adolescent's existing self-esteem levels affect their perception of negative feedback received via the online social networking site, Facebook.
- An investigation into the difference in perception between personal online self-presentations and peer self-presentations via the social networking site Facebook (i.e.: is an airbrushed photograph acceptable as a profile picture on a user's personal profile page but not on their friends?)
- An exploration of the pressures (such as popularity and social acceptance) experienced by South African adolescents associated with Facebook use.

5.3.2) For schools across South Africa:

Although research results indicate that most participants were aware of privacy issues and concerns regarding disclosure of personal information online, the researcher believes that additional education is needed regarding the perils of sharing personal information online for adolescents. This research has also highlighted the following potential areas where further education and awareness is needed:

- Educating adolescents regarding their rights in terms of interactions via the social networking site Facebook.
- Educating adolescents regarding the positive and negative impacts that interaction on Facebook can have on their self-esteem.
- Educating teachers and parents. It is important that they understand the dynamics related to their pupils' and children's interactions on Facebook so that when difficulties arise, they are empowered to assist the adolescent who may be struggling.

- Schools should begin to embrace the development of technology such as Facebook and begin to explore ways in which they can assist their pupils' psychosocial and educational development, while using online social media. Facebook in itself represents a possible avenue through which education and support might be rendered by the schools or teachers, to adolescent users specifically (i.e.: providing links to websites that explore the effects of Facebook over-use) through the development of a School Facebook Page. Pupils would be able to access such information anonymously, which may in itself, promote its use.

5.3.3) For Social Work in Schools

Research results reflect that interaction via the social network, Facebook, undoubtedly has an effect on the development of an adolescent's self-esteem. Additionally, as we have seen from the research, communication amongst adolescents via the Facebook website is pervasive amongst the student population. Consequently, it is important that the Social Workers in schools are informed and up-to-date with regards to developments in this area. For this reason, as a result of current research results the researcher recommends:

- Courses are provided for Social Work professionals and other school counselors so that they are made aware of the effects of online social networking through Facebook on the development of self. Additionally, courses should focus on the development as well as potential treatment programs that can be used in order to deal with problems linked to usage of the site.
- A collaboration between the school Social Worker and Governing Body of the school should result in the development of primary intervention strategies in order to deal with the difficulties (such as cyber-bullying) raised in this study.

5.3.4) For the Social Work profession

Research results not only reflect the pervasiveness of Facebook usage amongst the adolescent population, but it also indicates how far reaching the effects of its use can be. As such, social workers need to keep up-to-date with the current trends in adolescent Facebook use. The researcher recommends that they:

- Keep up to date with understanding the theories and dynamics related to the negative social problems as well as their effects on the adolescent population that arise from Facebook use so as to ensure the provision of the most effective treatment.
- Due to the changing nature of the communication which occurs between adolescents on the online social networking site, Facebook, it is recommended that assessment and intervention strategies by social workers are regularly updated so that they remain relevant, once again ensuring that the correct treatment is provided.

5.4) Conclusion

This chapter brought to the fore the main conclusions and recommendations in relation to the research study. Conclusions were discussed according to the original research objectives. The overall indication based on the results of this study is that Facebook has mostly favourable effects on adolescent self-esteem. Even though the research results indicate that there is most definitely a strong positive correlation between the social networking site, Facebook, and negative self-esteem, the benefit participants seem to gain through their interactions (such as support, friendship and feelings of inclusion and social connectedness) on Facebook far outweigh the negative consequences that could be experienced- resulting from various forms of negative feedback. Facebook's popularity amongst participants constitutes the reinforcement of a self-esteem promoting activity and is testament in itself, to Facebook's overall positive effect on

adolescent self-esteem. Feasible recommendations were then suggested with these findings in mind.

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APPENDICES

A - SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- Establish rapport – introduce self, explain purpose, motivation, time line and ethics (informed consent; confidentiality and permission).
- General demographic information – Age; Grade; Race; Gender

TRANSITION INTO QUESTIONS

1) What motivates adolescents to use Facebook?

- 1.1) Do you use Facebook?
- 1.2) How do you access it? (pc, cell phone, laptop, internet café etc)
- 1.3) How many times a day do you log on?
- 1.4) Do you use facebook chat on your phone?
- 1.5) Do you know how many friends you have online?
- 1.6) When you log onto your friends pages, are you aware of how many friends they have?
- 1.7) Why do you think your friends use it?

Prompt:

- To keep in contact with friends
- To meet new people
- To catch up with people's news without being in direct contact
- To join groups
- To find out about social events
- To let people know your news

- 1.7) Why do you use Facebook?
- 1.8) How many times do you have to meet a person before you add them as a friend on Facebook?

2) What determines the level of disclosure of personal information on Facebook?

2.1) How much about yourself do you reveal on your online profile?

Prompt:

- Name
- Birthday
- Gender
- School
- Contact details – ph number; e-mail addy, address
- Relationship status
- Family members- real and friends- why make friends family members?
- Favourite quotes/musicians/movies/series
- Personal description

2.2) How do you decide how much information you are going to share about yourself?

EG: On facebook, personal interests, favourite quotes, contact details, status

2.3) How often do you change your status updates?

Prompt:

- Once a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week
- Daily
- More than once a day

2.4) What would you typically include in your status updates?

Prompt:

- Having a good/bad day
- Fighting with a friend/boy/girlfriend/family member
- Achievement: eg: doing well/badly in a test
- Talking about social activities – drinking, smoking, hooking up
- Revealing private information about others. Eg: X got soooooo drunk last night and scored an ugly chick

- include friends names in activities you've done eg: Miki and I went shopping today

3) How does online social networking contribute to positive self esteem?

- 3.1) What does 'positive self esteem' mean to you?
- 3.2) Does Facebook ever help you feel good about yourself? If so, how?
- 3.3) What benefits do you think Facebook has for other adolescents and their self esteem? What makes it so popular?
- 3.4) Do you see a difference in someone commenting / 'liking' you status? Does it mean the same thing or is one better to do than the other?
- 3.5) How would you describe the people you keep in contact with on facebook:
 - as close friends that you communicate with on Facebook and real life
 - as more distant friends that you communicate with on Facebook but not as much real life
 - as acquaintances that are only your Facebook friends but you do not interact with

4) How does Facebook contribute towards negative self-esteem?

- 4.1) What does 'negative self esteem' mean to you?
- 4.2) Does Facebook ever make you feel negative about yourself? If so, how?
- 4.3) Do you think Facebook can be harmful to an adolescents self esteem? If so, how?

5) Do adolescents alter their online profiles to represent themselves differently from their real selves?

- 5.1) Do you think a stranger would get a clear(real/honest/authentic/true) picture of the kind of person you are if they looked only at your online profile?

5.2) Do you think your online profile is different from who you really are? If so, how?

5.3) Do you think your friends online profiles are different to who they really are?

6) Why do adolescents feel the need to alter their online representations of themselves?

6.1) Why do you think teenagers may feel the need to alter their online profiles and descriptions of themselves?

6.2) Why did you feel the need to alter your online profiles and descriptions?

7) What aspects of themselves do adolescents alter in their online profiles?

7.1) What about themselves do you think adolescents most often alter or change when creating their online profiles and descriptions?

7.2) What aspects of yourself have you most often felt the need to alter or change when creating your online profile and description?

7.3) What parts of your personality do you think are important to highlight on your profile page?

7.4) Is there anything you specifically avoid sharing in your online communication?

TRANSITION INTO CLOSING

- Maintain rapport: thanks for participation; process from here.